

Listening to History: Aurality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf

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Chapter One

Listening to history

1. Modernity and the ear

Virginia Woolf's writing career corresponds closely to a period of historic innovation in terms of exosomatic technologies for the enhancement and extension of human senses, and especially the sense of hearing. At the same time as developments in visual technology, notably the cinema, photography, and the electric light-bulb, her lifetime also witnessed the rapid evolution of the telephone and the phonograph, both invented in 1876, which were quickly followed by other devices for the amplification, transmission, and recording of sound, the microphone, and, more dramatically, the radio or wireless. During the modern period between the 1870s and the 1920s, therefore, private and public spaces were increasingly invaded by new acoustic technologies, transforming communications and reorientating conceptions of intimacy and distance, disrupting the subject's sense of the permanence or impermanence of experience, and even of time itself.

Generally speaking, modern life, particularly urban life, was increasingly noisy, with the spread of industrial machinery and motorised transport adding cacophonously to the auditory experience of town, city and metropolis. The Italian Futurists famously embraced the acceleration, speed and industrial power of modernity, but they also celebrated its explosion of man-made noise. The city in the early part of the twentieth century becomes a place of visual fragmentation, of glances and glimpses rather than the ocular control suggested by the steady gaze. But it is also a place of acoustic saturation, a space pervaded by noise, where the human

subject must orientate himself through the ear as much as the eye:

Let us cross a great modern capital with our ears more alert than our eyes, and we will get enjoyment from distinguishing the eddying of water, air and gas in metal pipes, the grumbling of noises that breathe and pulse with indisputable animality, the palpitation of valves, the coming and going of pistons, the howl of mechanical saws, the jolting of a tram on its rails, the cracking of whips, the flapping of curtains and flags....Every manifestation of our life is accompanied by noise. The noise, therefore, is familiar to our ear, and has the power to conjure up life itself.¹

The London of *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room*, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is visually indistinct, but aurally vivid, pervaded by the roar or hum of traffic, the cries of sourceless voices, the thumping of industrial machinery, the drone of aeroplanes, the clanging of bells, the hooting of motor horns and a whole repertoire of miscellaneous inhuman noises. Cityscape becomes soundscape, for modernism in general. Eliot's *Wasteland* is a polyphony of fragments, tuning radiophonically to disembodied voices, the "clatter and chatter" of bars, and snatches of song, while the Dublin of Joyce's *Ulysses* is experienced as an "agitated polyphony of travelling sounds and voices",² which disrupt the interior monologues of Bloom and Stephen Dedalus.

Machines, mechanical noise, and the sounds of the inanimate loom surprisingly large in Woolf's novels. Motor-cars, omnibuses, steamships, aeroplanes, gramophones, telephones, clocks, barrel organs, and an assortment of engines register as background urban drone, or disturbing irruptions of inhuman sound, uncanny simulacra of the human voice, or prosopopeic articulations of otherness. Generally speaking, mechanical noise signifies either alterity or the tyranny of chronological time. The London of *The Voyage Out* is foggy and visually vague, characterized by the cries of street traders, "shooting motor cars", "thundering drays", and "jingling hansoms" (5). The steamship *Euphrosyne* makes a "loud

melancholy moan” as it disembarks, and is answered by other, equally “sad” ships on the river (9). The metropolis is a place of disorientation and mystery, of alienation and the incipient violence of a modern industrial-imperial capital. The novel begins with the alienating otherness of the urban and ends with the uncanny cries of jungle animals, the familiar strangeness, or strange familiarity, of alien species. The illusion of patriarchal order and the authority of the paternal word are dissipated by the primordial and the semiotic.

In *Jacob's Room*, too, London is a place of invasive and perpetual noise. Hyde Park is circled “incessantly, by turning wheels”, motor cars pass “incessantly over the bridge of the Serpentine”, Regent Street is “full of the roar of the traffic, impersonal and un pitying” (144-8). The air is “full of whistling and concussions”, harsh voices, martial music, the clamour of bells, and the mechanical music of barrel-organs. The nation is on the brink of war, and the strident, discordant noise of the city anticipates the aural barrage of the trenches. We are reminded that the carnage in Flanders will be a war of machines, a blind, visionless war, a blitzkrieg against the ear. The experience of the First World War was one both of visual deprivation and auditory overload. Trench warfare, gas and smoke all combined to obliterate any coherent view of either the enemy or the terrain, while the constant barrage of artillery, machine-gun fire, and, later in the conflict, the noise of tanks and aeroplanes, provided an incessant assault upon the ear, producing the novel syndrome of shell-shock. Air-raids too were a peculiarly aural experience, disempowering the eye and prioritizing the ear for the terrestrial targets, while making them invisible from the remote aerial perspective of the pilot.

Septimus Smith is a casualty of this cacophany, a victim of shell-shock. The throbbing of motor engines, the sound of an aeroplane “boring into the ears of all the people in the Mall, in the Green Park, in Piccadilly, in Regents Street, in

Regent's Park" (MD 23), along with shards of overheard conversation and the "barking" and "howling" (27) coming from London Zoo act as a kind of auditory mnemonic for Septimus' wartime experiences, activating and intensifying his psychosis and abjection. In one of his psychotic, hallucinated episodes, the blaring of motor horns, the hum of traffic and the sound of an "old man playing a penny whistle", become the 'exquisite plaint' of a form of music. Sound becomes visible in a deranged synaesthesia (75). Whereas the Italian Futurists celebrated the din of the city, its "indisputed animality" and its capacity to "conjure up life itself", for Woolf incessant urban noise is intrusive, de-centering and disruptive, a subtle but persistent menace to ontological security.

More than industrialization and motorization, though, it is acoustic technology itself which does most to re-order the hierarchy of the senses during the period of high modernism. The ocularcentrism prevalent since the Enlightenment consolidates itself in many ways, through the growth of photography and the cinema, and through the celestial, cartographic perspective afforded by flight, but is also challenged by the dramatic impact of the telephone, the phonograph and the radio. The advent of the telephone 'seemed to promise a regime of the auditory, in which distances and separations were collapsed in an uncannily intimate proximity' (Connor 205). The voices and bodily sounds of others, right down to the finest inflections, tones and timbres suddenly gained access to the inner ear of the listener from remote distances, reconfiguring space and notions of privacy. As Steven Connor reveals, the medical profession became interested in the telephone as a kind of long-range diagnostic tool, recruiting the auditory to 'the service of a scopic epistemology', in which "the interior of one body is transmitted, almost without mediation, to the inner ear of the listener" (206), challenging corporeal integrity and the epistemological assumption of an inside and an outside, as well as libidinizing the aural in an unsettling way. The collapse of distance and the

remote intimacy inherent in the widening use of the telephone, along with the uncanny experience of the apparently sourceless radiophonic voice, transmitted invisibly through the air, helped to undermine the certainties of Enlightenment ocularcentrism, creating a conception of space as much more diffuse, variable and non-linear. Space becomes imaginary, elsewhere, virtual, and less easily visualizable.

The increasingly widespread availability of the gramophone had a somewhat different psychological and social impact. The visibility of the gramophone as an object, its palpably inscriptive mechanism, aligned it as much to writing as to speaking, while also foregrounding the aberrant, scandalous fusion of the inanimate and the human. Dead matter was somehow reproducing the individual nuances of human voices, and, sometimes, the voices of the dead at that. While the telephone permitted the “active and excursive self-augmentation of the voice”, the phonograph was notable for “the deathly passivity of its mechanical replication” (Connor 217). Connor differentiates these technologies on the basis of gender, characterizing the former as masculine, or “androtelephonic”, and the latter as feminine, or “gynophonographic” (218). While the one liberates and empowers the voice, the other enables its capture and confinement. Yet the gramophone, because it defies chronological time and cheats death, also retains a singular uncanniness, an otherness beyond that of the telephone, which is strictly tied to sequential time. The alterity of the recorded voice preoccupies Michel Leiris, a fragment of whose *Biffures* occupies the margin of Derrida's “Tympan”, his introduction to *Margins of Philosophy*:

And when from spoken language - which is sufficiently enigmatic in itself, since it is only from the instant in which it is formulated, in external fashion or not, that thought takes on its reality - one comes to sung language, what one encounters before one is an enigma of the second degree, seeing that the closer one is in a sense to the corporal structures (of which each note emitted has the appearance of being the direct fruit) and, consequently, the

more certain one is of apparently standing on firm ground, one finds oneself, in truth, in the grasp of the ineffable, the melodic line presenting itself as the translation, in a purely sonorous idiom, of that which could not be said by means of words. And even more so when the source of the song, rather than being a human mouth (that is, an organ with which we are more or less familiar), is a mechanical device adding to what is already strange in musical speech the surprise of being reproduced; one is then face to face with a mystery in the almost pure state.³

The phonographic voice, therefore, is triply enigmatic, and, since the sung voice is in itself ineffable, aporetic to the second degree. Corporeal noise becomes signification, becomes melody, becomes mechanical replication, becomes uncanny simulacrum. This deep level of ineffability is exploited by Woolf, most notably in *Between the Acts*, where the gramophone provides the most insistent, unsettling and disruptive voice of Miss La Trobe's pageant (see chapter six).

2. The middle ear

Derrida's "Tympan" envisages philosophy as the apparatus of an ear, "one that has learned to tune out everything but the sound of its own name".⁴ According to Derrida, philosophy believes it controls 'the margin of its volume and that it thinks its other' (149), that, in fact, it appropriates alterity as its own, making any 'penetration' of its 'field of listening resonate within itself' (151). Addressing the totalizing properties of philosophy, its capacity to, as it were, exceed its own boundaries and colonize its own otherness, Derrida uses the labyrinthine structure of the ear, with its complex channels, membranes, cavities and mechanisms, to suggest an oblique critique.

The tympanum, or ear-drum, is a transparent, permeable membrane "separating the auditory cavity from the middle ear" and is stretched obliquely. It is a "double membrane that can be struck from either side" (164), by noise, and then by the tiny hammer located on its inside. Because the tympanum slants or "squints" in this

way, its sensitivity to vibration is enhanced. In the ear, the hammer acts on the inner surface of “the tympanic membrane”, responding to outside noise, both mediating and communicating; it transmits sonic vibrations and protects the tympanum from excessive noise by its reciprocal, sympathetic vibration, “protects it, while acting upon it” (152). The middle ear balances internal and external pressures, and the instrument of this balance is the skewed tympanum. If the philosophical ear can be “spoken to” in an appropriately oblique way, Derrida suggests, then perhaps its tympanic membrane can be penetrated and its totalizing impulse undermined or dissipated. Thus philosophy, traditionally the apotheosis of the symbolic and the paternal word, can be ambushed by setting the “*loxo*s in the *logos* to work”, the oblique within the word (154).

“Tympan” makes explicit just such a strategy in its own form and procedures. Made up of two adjacent columns, Derrida’s own, and a narrower column, comprising a long quotation from Michel Leiris’s memoirs, *Biffures* (1948), marginality, obliquity, intertextuality and otherness are thus visibly and audibly inscribed in the text.

“Tympan” addresses the question of “how to pierce this ear from outside without rendering it simply useless” (147). Crudely speaking, this is the question posed by deconstruction; how to preserve philosophical and discursive signification in the face of poststructuralist linguistic theory, how to make meaning out of slippery words and ephemeral sounds.

Woolf’s fiction, particularly her later work, also addresses this problem, setting to work the oblique within the word, balancing the pressures of speaking and listening-to-oneself-speak, of *phono*s and *logo*s, of the semiotic and symbolic, the outside and inside of language. The rhythms, silences, sonic patterns, and acoustic events in her writing act obliquely on the reading subject, encrypting a marginalised text which is transmitted through the oblique membrane of the

tympanum. Her writing can thus be imagined as situated in the middle ear, at the membraneous border of the tympanum, between outer and inner, history and subjectivity, society and solipsism, responding to the vibrations of both orders of being. Whereas Derrida literally marginalizes the Other in “Tympan”, so that it can be seen and heard separately while still acting upon the proper text, Woolf leaves the proper and the Other organically intertwined. The subject of her fiction, then, is its relationship with its own Other, as well as the Other of history, inscribed within itself.

The Other in “Tympan”, the fragment of Michel Leiris’s *Biffures*, is a streaming, uninhibited meditation on the ear, the voice, and “the deep country of hearing”, with its “cartilaginous’ caverns and ‘grottoes” (155). Beginning with ‘the subterranean name of *Persephone*’ (149), it proceeds, through a series of serpentine, spiralling images and associations, to hear within that name the word “perce-oreille” (ear-piercer), in English, “ear-wig” (152). Like the ear-wig, which is sometimes supposed to perforate the human ear-drum with its pincers, and which buries itself in “fruit pits”, Persephone too buries herself “in a subterranean kingdom” (155). The vulnerability of the ear-drum to the “ear-piercer” is thus, in some way, equivalent to the vulnerability of the philosophical ear (of the adjacent text) to deconstruction. In an analogous way, Woolf’s fiction foregrounds its susceptibility to self-deconstruction, advertising the vulnerability of its own tropes and semi-transparent textures, which become self-piercing, so to speak, at points of epiphany and aporia, at those moments of being when the abject or sublime escape the constraints of the symbolic.

3. The subject and the maternal voice

If the ear and voice preoccupy Derrida (in *The Ear of the Other* ⁵, as well as

'Tympan'), they also figure prominently in Julia Kristeva's theories of the semiotic chora and the formation of the subject. Like the ear, the chora is a type of receptacle, a primal space relating to the prehistory of the subject, defined by the voice and body of the mother. The mother's voice provides the infant with its first spatialization and listening experience. Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* ⁶ offers a concise summary of some of the positions taken regarding the role of the maternal voice in the formation of the subject. Central to all of these perspectives is the idea of an acoustic cocoon woven around the newborn infant by the sound of the mother's voice, and variously characterized as a "bath of sounds" (Didier Anzieu), a "sonorous envelope", (Guy Rosalato and Mary Ann Doane), an "umbilical net" (Michel Chion) and a "mobile receptacle" (Julia Kristeva's more familiar *chora*). Silverman characterises the sonorous envelope and the umbilical net as the utopian and dystopian extremes amongst these retrospective conceptualizations of the maternal voice. The former sees the space created by the maternal voice as an envelope of blissful, "operatic" plenitude and "celestial melody", a "primordial listening experience" which is the 'prototype for all subsequent auditory pleasure' (84-5). Within the terms of this model, the maternal voice itself is a lost object, the lack of which accounts (along with other lost objects) for the subject's incompleteness and desire.

Michel Chion's formulation, on the other hand, imagines the enclosure described by the maternal voice as a place of entrapment, an "umbilical net" or "cobweb" (74), a "uterine night of nonmeaning", from which the infant is delivered by its entry into the symbolic code. Chion opposes the maternal voice and the paternal word, thereby identifying the "mother with sound and the father with meaning" (75). Once securely situated outside of the umbilical web, the subject comes to associate the maternal voice with infantile babble, the "vocal and auditory afterbirth" (81) which has been repudiated by the paternal word. Silverman shows that both of these

formulations hinge around the figure inside / outside, and that, for a movement between the two to be possible, for the infant to emerge outside of sonorous envelope or umbilical net, an inside has to be left behind. The trope inside / outside, therefore, effectively abandons the mother in the space created by her own voice, in the auditory enclosure evacuated by the infant, and therefore imprisoned in nonmeaning, babble, and vocalic rather than verbal sonority. Silverman sees this as a “disavowal of the mother’s role both as an agent of discourse and as a model for linguistic identification”, as well as an “alignment of femininity with an unpleasurable and disempowering interiority” (100).

According to Silverman, Kristeva relegates the mother to the interior of the semiotic chora, denying her linguistic capabilities, so that she becomes an “agency antipathetic to language and identity” (105). Silverman notes Kristeva’s “disavowal of the tutelary role of the mother”, her ‘refusal to assign the female subject a viable place within the symbolic, and sees herself as trying to “reclaim the position of the analyst for the female voice” (107). Notwithstanding the foregoing reservations, Silverman agrees that the chora “remains one of the permanent scenes” of subjectivity, not so much superseded as covered over and denied by succeeding spatial developments. Kristeva is also far more willing to conceive of the subject finding itself once again within the *chora*”By relegating the mother to the interior of the *chora* / womb, Kristeva reduces her to silence.” Therefore, according to Silverman, Kristeva sees the artist as speaking for the mother, returning her voice, “situating herself emphatically on the side of castration, language and thethetic, and replacing the chora with “artistic practices”...’ (113).

This argument would appear to contain a number of contradictions and to misread the radical nature of Kristeva’s position. Kristeva’s ideas about the maternal voice also rely upon the trope inside / outside, though in a more complex and ambiguous

way than that allowed by Silverman. The mother's voice, along with 'the breast, given and withdrawn' and 'lamplight capturing the gaze',⁷ helps to constitute the primitive space of the *chora*, a term adapted from Plato to designate a 'maternally connoted' receptacle, 'improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming' (Kristeva 133), and therefore suitably premature in relation to the paternal word or symbolic code. These archaic 'markers' are the first co-ordinates of 'spatiality', and help to absorb and inhibit the first vocalizations or 'distress calls' of the infant, which Kristeva calls 'anaclices' (282). At this stage 'there is not yet an outside' or an inside, only the unity or totality of mother and infant. Clearly, at this point, the inside / outside opposition is under strain as a rhetorical formulation, even allowing for the fact that Kristeva is assuming the perspective of the infant. The figure, like all binary oppositions, is predicated on its symmetry, so that there must be an outside for there to be an inside. If there is neither, then identity (including the identity of the signifier) is deprived of the materials out of which it makes itself. In one sense, therefore, the collapse of the trope into paradox is an entirely consistent function of the tension between the symbolic and semiotic regimes, the subversion of the former by the latter, and what Kristeva calls the improbability of the *chora*.

The strain on the inside / outside binarism becomes evident when we try to locate the mother during this early semiotic phase. She is presumably both inside the choric enclosure, contained within the envelope of her own voice along with the infant, and outside of it, as subject of the symbolic code, thereby simultaneously occupying mutually exclusive spaces. To complicate matters further, the subject who has entered language is also a subject who has internalized the *chora* as 'semiotic disposition' or libidinal economy, providing for the persistence of the semiotic within the symbolic. The *chora* is therefore located both inside the nurturing mother, as semiotic disposition, and around the mother and infant as protective enclosure and the child's first 'riant' spatialization. At the same time, the

mother is outside the chora, having entered *into* the symbolic order, so that from this perspective the chora itself is now situated on the outside of language.

This impossible oscillation between inside and outside is partly the result of the simultaneous adoption of synchronic and diachronic perspectives, those of infant and adult subject, which cannot easily be held within a single discursive frame. Also though, the contradiction is an illustration of the persistence of the semiotic within the symbolic, a symbiosis within language which prohibits complete discursive mastery of any language event, and promotes the logical aberration of paradox, without lapsing wholly into nonmeaning. To put it another way, this time in the terms of the medieval *trivium*, the breakdown of oppositional logic is a consequence of the inevitable interference of rhetoricity within any grammatical formulation, what Paul de Man sees as the fundamentally tropological nature of language, even at its most abstract. Rhetoric destabilizes grammar in the same way that the semiotic permeates and subverts the symbolic, providing language with affect and materiality. This is the point that Silverman appears to misjudge. The mother is both inside and outside of the semiotic chora, just as the maternal voice is both inside and outside of the paternal word, or symbolic code. In this way, rather than denying the mother a voice, Kristeva privileges the maternal and the vocal over the paternal and the purely verbal, identifying the symbolic code, not the condition of maternity or the semiotic, as the regime which is predicated on loss, denial and repression.

Relating all of this to Derrida's 'Tympan', the site of the 'middle ear' would appear to offer a way out of the rhetorical impasse inherent in the inside / outside binarism. As a permeable membrane between interiority and exteriority, both mediating and responding to external vibration, the tympanum is neither inside nor outside, but part of both and between the two at one and the same time. This privileged

interjacency is precisely the territory sought and occupied by Woolf's fiction, which habitually blurs the distinction between interior and exterior, thought and speech, mimesis and diegesis, and listens to (and orchestrates) the semiotic within language, as well as working within the syntactical and semantic order of the symbolic code.

4. Rhetoric

Another way of thinking about the internal dynamics of language, one which complements the Kristevan linguistic symbiosis of semiotic and symbolic, and which seems relevant to Woolf's work, is suggested by Paul de Man's 'The Epistemology of Metaphor'.⁸ Crudely speaking, de Man sees language as the product of a reciprocity between grammar and rhetoric; grammar is indispensable to rhetoric while the grammatical is subject to an inescapable rhetoricity. In other words, language is fundamentally and irrevocably tropological, and since all metaphorical tropes are a species of translation, language is subject to a kind of perpetual motion, to inherent tautology, to 'the disfiguring power of figuration' (de Man 49). Consequently, 'temporal articulations, such as narratives or histories are a correlative of rhetoric and not the reverse' (50). The implication of this is that 'literary' narratives, which confess to their own rhetoricity and foreground the 'proliferating and disruptive power of figural language' (50), have a more transparent relationship with referentiality than 'historical' narratives, which tend to deny or disguise their tropological nature.

Like de Man, Woolf is aware of the instability of rhetorical tropes, the perpetual motion of metaphor, and the reciprocal tug between grammar and rhetoric. In *The Voyage Out*, for instance, the unstable binarism inside / outside, which pervades the novel, releases a number of related dualities, to do with interiority and the

referential world, imperial centre and colonial margins, the maternal voice and the paternal word, oppositions which the text blurs and problematizes (and which will be explored more fully in the next chapter). Similarly, conventional patriarchal and imperial rhetoric are allowed to deconstruct themselves during the course of the text, finally disintegrating in the alterity of the South American jungle. The metaphor of the state as machine is another trope which is on the move throughout the novel. The distinction between organism and mechanism, sentient and inanimate, is destabilized by a series of metaphorical aberrations and by the registration of inhuman and mechanical noise, introducing the additional variable of the phoneme, which Derrida calls, in 'Tympan', the 'phenomenon of the labyrinth' (157). The 'speaking' gramophone in *Between the Acts* is a more explicit catachresis, with similarly aberrant ramifications. For de Man, 'the 'materiality of actual history' gets 'produced, *happens*, as the residue or excess of tropology' .⁹ Woolf's fiction exploits this tropological exorbitance to posit an alternative, 'other' historicity, hitherto marginalised by traditional, linear historical narratives.

5. Names

Traditional history depends for its validity on, amongst other things, the semantic and referential stability of the proper name, which grants specificity and solidity to historical subjects and places. But, as Derrida and Kristeva have shown, names are not quite as singular or semantically stable as most orthodox historiography assumes. All sorts of meanings can be heard in a name, as the marginal quotation, running parallel to Derrida's own column in 'Tympan', clearly demonstrates. The name *Persephone* inspires a prolonged meditation on the figure of the spiral, or helix, prompted by that name's phonemic resemblance to 'perce-oreille', the French word for ear-wig. A further aural association, based on the suffix *phone*,

leads into an extended deconstruction of the gramophone. Furthermore, postcolonial experience, discourse, and theory have done much to re-politicize names and the process of naming, as part of a wider and more comprehensive historical revisionism. This destabilization and politicization of the proper name, then, (along with poststructuralist theories of language generally) relativizes and disrupts History's assumptions about referential reality.

For Kristeva, the proper name is a 'substantive of definite reference ... but of indefinite signification' (Kristeva 290). Names are deictics, pointing to people or places, but are also semantically indeterminate, containing both an absence and an excess of meaning. They are intrinsically anaphoric, referring back to previous encounters with objects, spaces or subjects, and, ultimately, to the originary lost objects of subjecthood, the mother, the maternal voice, and the semiotic chora. They are also signifiers of unlimited potential, in that they 'stand for' an infinite set of properties and qualities associated with a person or place.

Derrida too discusses the 'politics of the proper name' in *The Ear of the Other*, arguing that when one is dead only the name 'can inherit', and 'this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man's name, a name of death' (7).¹⁰ The patronym precedes and outlives its individual bearer, thereby inscribing within itself the death of the subject. For Derrida, then, the name, and particularly the paternal name, is merely usurped, becoming the barren, but untranslatable signifier of phallogocentrism. A History based on proper names becomes little more than a sterile succession of deaths.

On the other hand, in postcolonial (and particularly Caribbean) fiction and poetry, names become positively charged with ideological and historical significance. For instance, names and naming are central to the epic composition and performance

of multiple histories, the meshing of cultures, and the 'stitching' of hemispheres accomplished in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*.¹¹ The first chapter of Book One reminds us of St. Lucia's lost aboriginal name, "'lounalao", "where the iguana is found"', and in describing the construction of canoes, invests the felled trees with numinousness, sentience and language, so that their 'decimation' replicates the original colonial decimation of tribal cultures:

The bearded elders endured the decimation
of their tribe without uttering a syllable
of that language they had uttered as one nation... (6)

Similarly, when the completed vessels are blessed before their launch into the 'surpliced shallows', Achille defends the creole spelling of his craft's name, *In God We Troust* from the priest's condescension:

When he smiled at Achille's canoe, *In God We Troust*
Achille said: "Leave it! Is God's spelling and mine." (8)

In Book Three, 'out looking for his name and his soul' (154), Achille encounters his 'father', Afolabe, after being 'whirred by the swift's flywheel' (131) through time and space, across horizon, meridian, epoch, to engage in a complex dialogue concerning identity, memory, amnesia, prediction and his own name. Afolabe tells him 'a name means something' and calls him 'the ghost of a name'. And yet Achille's return home is a joyful, triumphant one. He is elated by the pull of home, the utterance of his ship-mate ('the black bugger beautiful, / though' 158) and the inscription in the sky, in the 'letters of the sea-swift', of his father's name. The name has been remembered, re-possessioned, and transplanted.

Woolf, too, is alert to the alterity, potency and semantic peculiarities of names. *Jacob's Room*, for instance, foregrounds the enunciation and reiteration of names

(often in the absence of their bearers) to the extent that they are curiously defamiliarized by being repeatedly sounded. The name Jacob Flanders suggests both patriarchal genealogy and the slaughter of the First World War, becoming the name of the dead twice over, while names in *Between the Acts* somehow manage to connote both continuity and ephemerality, antiquity and the present moment (see chapters three and six). The name Orlando is made into a synonym for sexual ambiguity, the constructedness and fluidity of gender, the plurality of identity, and the simultaneity of historical epochs. Percival is the absent centre of *The Waves*, the silent opacity whose name reverberates through the monologues of the other six characters, coming to signify their thwarted hopes and desires as well as the disintegration of imperialism. The name becomes overloaded with meaning, but the human subject it denotes remains impenetrable.

In *The Voyage Out*, conventional imperial rhetoric is deployed by the colonial tourists, as they survey the 'infinite sun-dried earth' of the South American landscape, blithely assuming its namelessness. The 'vast expanse of land', seen from the summit of Monte Rosa, is compared to England, where 'villages and hills' have 'names' (194). The discursive mastery implied by naming is integral to the colonial enterprise; appellation becomes appropriation. The colonial equation of foreign territories with emptiness, namelessness and exoticism is characteristic of imperial rhetoric, and is in sharp contrast to *Between the Acts*, where England and Englishness are at least partly signified by a profusion of patronyms and place names. In the latter novel, proper names have become the untranslatable signifiers of an untranslatable nationhood.

6. Nation

Homi Bhabha defines nationhood or 'nationness' by means of a rhetoric of subtly

calibrated quantities and gradations, imagining it as an inscrutable space between related concepts and properties. The space of the nation is delineated by a network of comparatives, is hollowed out by those things it is not, or at least not quite. It is 'more complex than 'community'; more symbolic than 'society'; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than *patrie* ; more rhetorical than the reason of state; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than 'the subject'; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications - gender, race or class - than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism'.¹² Nation falls between two perspectives or modalities, the 'pedagogic', distinguished temporally as a perpetual 'meanwhile', as 'succession without synchrony', and the 'performative', the 'alienating, iterative time of the sign', which is both 'incessant and instantaneous'. Nationness is too diffuse, indeterminate and heterogeneous to be represented solely by the patriarchal didacticism of the pedagogic, while the performative fails to take full account of the pervasive influence of mythological and historical narratives in forming this psychic space.

For Kristeva, the concept of nation can be deconstructed, the confines of national space exploded, and linear temporality undone, by a recognition of the foreigner within ourselves. The 'stranger' is the 'hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder'.¹³ Exile can produce a privileged and 'therapeutic' perspective, where the language of the foreigner comes to depend upon its own 'rhetorical strength'. Because the foreigner is both outside and on the inside of the nation, excluded from the 'abode' in which he lives, his language becomes 'absolute in its formalism, excessive in its sophistication', rhetoric becomes 'dominant' and 'baroque' (Kristeva 21), in order to compensate for his alienation. The simultaneous fascination for, and rejection of,

the foreign is founded in 'infantile desires and fears of the other - the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive', so that when we 'flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious - that "improper" facet of our impossible "own and proper."' (191). Between rejection and identification the boundaries of the subject and the containing vessel of the nation dissolve, the border between 'imagination' and 'reality' becomes permeable and transparent. If the foreigner is within the subject, then we are all foreign, or none of us are. The nation, then, is a negativity, predicated on a rejection of the 'improper' otherness of ourselves, defined in terms of what it suppresses or fears, and therefore recoverable only by excavating what is buried and articulating what remains unsaid or unsayable.

For Woolf too, nation can be imagined in terms of interjacency and alterity, aporia and hybridity. England and Englishness are somewhere between the alienating urbanity of the metropolis and the primordiality of nature; somewhere between modernity and tradition, synchrony and diachrony, between collective identity and the alterity of the-nation-as-one, homogenizing celestial perspective and heterogeneous terrestrial minutiae; between the absolutism of chronological time and the organicism of cyclical temporality, the ramshackle contingency of events and the retrospective construction of epochs, between the archetypal and the particular. The narration of nation for Woolf involves a complex interweaving of all of these binary oppositions, and an acknowledgement that nation is substantially a construct of rhetoric and utterance, and of the residue and omissions of rhetoric. Nation can be heard brooding in the silences, interruptions and ellipses that mark the conversational exchanges of *Between the Acts*. It is beyond and beneath the sterile or incoherent imperial rhetoric of the Dalloways in *The Voyage Out*; it is more fertile and elusive than the barren utterances of Mr. Ramsey, more coherent than the psychotic interior monologues of Septimus Smith, which are the tragic

rhetorical residue of nationalism. It makes itself heard in the disembodied fantasies of Rhoda and in Louis's postcolonial alienation, in Percival's speechless opacity and Susan's maternal earthiness; it lurks in Bernard's sequential narratives, his thwarted attempts at closure.

Nation is also audible, though, in the soundscapes of the novels. It can be traced in the hum and roar of London traffic, in the ringing of telephones and the uncanny voices of gramophones, in the throb of engines, the thumping of industrial machinery, the zoom of aeroplanes and in footsteps echoing in university quadrangles. It is heard in the creak of empty chairs and the sounds of houses settling and subsiding, furniture and flowers shifting minutely in empty rooms, the drone of trees and the chirp of birds, in grinding barrel-organs and the cackle and crackle of mechanical music, in the white noise of the elements and the background cacophany of the city. Woolf's fiction listens to the sounds of nationness, as well as the interior voices of national subjects, to the ancient noises of the inhuman and the primeval, as much as to ephemeral human discourse. Nation, then, is more than genealogy and geography, history and culture, ethnicity and ethos, names and nature, racial stereotypes and mythical archetypes; it takes place where the foreign and the familiar meet, at the border between rhetoric and the inner voice, at the boundary that both separates and unites subjectivity and society, that resonates to the vibrations of the self as well as the reverberations of history, that at once divides and joins inside and outside. Nation makes itself most known at the permeable and oblique membrane of the middle ear, the tympanum.

7. Time

In the medieval epistemological model for the sciences, the *quadrivium*, time is explicitly linked to music, which is, crudely speaking, the formalization and

aestheticization of sound. De Man's *Resistance to Theory* explores the difficulties of articulation between the constituent parts of the *trivium* (rhetoric, grammar and logic), and between the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, the non-verbal sciences of number, space, motion and time (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music). Rhetoric and time are related to each other in terms of sound and aurality, through rhythms, silences, sonic patterns, and through the musicality and suprasegmental features of language:

'Rhetoric, by its actively negative relationship to grammar and to logic, certainly undoes the claims of the *trivium* (and, by extension, of language) to be an epistemologically stable construct. The resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language, a dimension which is perhaps more explicitly in the foreground in literature ... than in any other verbal manifestations..' (368)

Reading is thus a process in which 'grammatical cognition is undone, at all times, by its rhetorical displacement. The model of the *trivium* contains within itself the pseudo-dialectic of its own undoing and its history tells the story of this dialectic' (368). This dialectic boils down to a reciprocity between grammar and rhetoric, a kind of mutual sabotage, where each linguistic order inevitably informs and distorts the other. The rhetorization of grammar is therefore a process of sound and time, as well as semantics and the instability of figural language. The tropological is related to the auditory, to the ear and voice, as well as to the word.

Reading the fiction of Woolf is to be particularly aware of this auditory dimension. Her writing listens to itself, so to speak, and exhorts the reader to listen, not only to its auditory patterning, but for the tropological instability of language itself, for aberrant metaphors and metaphorical aberrations. If pursued, many of these tropes release differing and contradictory notions of time. The recurring motif of bells and chiming clocks, for instance, connotes the regularity of chronological time, pure diachrony, or what Bhabha calls 'sequence without synchrony'. At the

same time, though, the experience of hearing is often described in terms of a slowing down or suspension of the subject's sense of time, to the extent that sounds become visible, 'leaden rings dissolving in the air' (MD 4), or 'silver disks' of speech, dissolving in 'young men's minds' (JR 32), or the 'perfect rings' of words floating in the air (BA 6). Sound becomes spatial rather than temporal, recalling the originary receptacle of the semiotic chora, adumbrated by the maternal voice. The moment stretches hypnotically, rippling outwards with the simultaneous motion and stasis of waves, suggesting perpetuity and ephemerality at one and the same time. Temporality is temporarily confined to the singularity of the moment, to what Lyotard calls the 'being-now' of the heard sound (179).

Lyotard too alludes to the *quadrivium*, closely identifying time with listening. Indeed, he asks, 'can one construct time entirely without reference to listening? In listening memory close and distant, presence, waiting, fluctuation, a process of forming which is itself fluctuating are played out - in short, all of internal time, the inner sense' (174).¹⁴ Certainly there is a close correspondence in Woolf's work between listening and subjective time, sound and memory, hearing and presence, musicality and epiphany. Time is very much a fluctuating process, where different temporal modalities overlap and coexist. The primordial persists into the present, while the present itself is permeated by memory and futurity. The 'moment of being' is an uncanny suspension of time, a re-emergence of the timelessness or parachrony of the semiotic, experienced as an intimation of abjection or sublimity. Diurnal rhythms, the regular patterns of the waves, the seasons, and the years, 'signify no progression but the bareness of natural cycles, permanent recurrence and alternation, or else static completeness' (Bowlby 76).¹⁵ Sequential, chronological time is equally woven into Woolf's complex web of temporalities. The feminine temporality of cycle and recurrence and the implicit teleology of masculine chronology are mutually dependent, the one simultaneously disrupting

and authenticating the other. The passage of time is not to be denied, but nor can its impalpable operations be captured.

As well as the masculine time of orthodox history, which is linear and teleological, and which she sees as 'obsessive', a form of enslavement, Kristeva identifies two temporal modalities associated with female subjectivity; cyclical time and 'monumental' time. The former is founded on repetition, on 'cycles, gestation, and the eternal return of biological rhythm that is similar to the rhythm of nature'. This mode of time can be 'shocking in its predictability', but its simultaneity with extra-subjective, or 'cosmic' time is the source of 'resplendent visions and unnameable jouissance'. Monumental time, on the other hand, is 'all-encompassing and infinite, like imaginary space', the time of eternity. According to Kristeva, the male or female 'hysteric' (who, in Freudian terms, suffers from 'reminiscences') rejects linear temporality, identifying instead with the cyclical and monumental modalities (PK 352-3).¹⁶ Of all of Woolf's characters, Rhoda in *The Waves* would seem to be most closely identified with monumental time, with eternity, and imaginary, infinite space, while Susan, like Mrs. Ramsey, embodies cyclical temporality and the rhythms of maternity. For Kristeva, as for Freud, the 'unconscious does not know time'. Whereas 'the neurotic seeks to repress the outside-time of the unconscious', the psychotic 'attempts to tear a hole in it' (PK 129). Septimus Smith, Woolf's most clearly psychotic character, is just such 'a specialist of ellipses', omitting logical links, or making logical deductions from scrambled sensory evidence, particularly from aural and synaesthetic hallucinations. Rachel too, in *The Voyage Out*, returns to the abjection of the unconscious during her final feverish illness; the utterances of others degenerate into 'gabble', until she hears 'nothing but a faint booming sound, which was the sound of the sea rolling over her head' (VO 322). So, in addition to linear, cyclical and monumental temporalities, Woolf's fiction explores the 'outside-time' of the unconscious, and all of these modalities are

substantially registered through the auditory.

Rachel Bowlby examines the different forms of time in Woolf's work with special reference to *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the former novel, the linearity of masculine chronology is graphically represented by Mr. Ramsey's alphabetical, consecutive organization of knowledge. Epistemology is shrunk to sequence, and stuck at the letter Q. The first and third sections of the novel, however, are distinguished by a more complex temporality, based on a diurnal framework and the division of the present moment between the consciousnesses of the different characters, their memories of other times and places. Present and past are pluralised, creating a web of spaces and times. The central section of the novel, 'Time Passing', is 'represented rather as cyclical repetition than as the multiple story lines or criss-cross networks - to the past, and to other places - of a day' (Bowlby 75). Time is characterized in this section by a combination of stasis and violent activity. The over-riding silence and stillness of the house is punctuated by sudden or rhythmical sounds, 'hangings that flapped, wood that creaked' (TL 147), or the elemental noise of wind, thunder and waves. 'Historical' events, like the death of Mrs. Ramsey and Prue Ramsey, or the advent of war, are parenthesised, sidelined by the microscopic focus on space, objects and on the effects of time on the fabric of the house. The context of silence and stillness amplifies and isolates even the tiniest of sounds, so that the sudden loosening and swinging of a shawl reverberates with a 'roar' and a 'rupture' (148). This is highly sensitive, high fidelity listening, stethoscopic listening, which disrupts accepted hierarchies of events, privileging the internal sounds of a house over the external cacophany of history, the flapping of fabric over the death of the subject. This reorientation not only foregrounds the indiscriminate indifference of 'cosmic' time, but problematizes the practice of History, satirizing its arbitrary selectivity and overturning its system of priorities.

8. History: Nietzsche and Foucault

Different ways of experiencing and thinking about time naturally suggest different models of history. Paul Hamilton has shown how contemporary or postmodern historicisms, those suggested by the work of Foucault, by Derridean post-structuralism, postcolonialism and feminism, are in some measure dialogic responses to the grand narratives of modernism.¹⁷ In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', for instance, Foucault re-shapes the second of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* 'in order to show the illusoriness of both subject and object except as the effects of a will to power transcending both' (134).¹⁸

In 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life', Nietzsche identifies three models, or 'species' of history, the '*monumental*', the '*antiquarian*', and the '*critical*', each corresponding to different human drives.¹⁹ Monumental history, crudely speaking a history of 'great men' and great deeds, pertains to the human subject as a 'being who acts and strives', antiquarian history meets the desire for preservation and reverence, and critical history is a model for human suffering and 'deliverance'. For Nietzsche, the impulse to make and bequeath monuments 'deceives by analogies', inspiring folly and 'fanaticism' (71); antiquarian history is indiscriminate and sterile, able to preserve, but not 'engender' life, undervaluing 'that which is becoming' (75); and critical history is either destructive (analytical), unjust, or partial, producing a past 'in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate' (76). A degree of amnesia, Nietzsche therefore argues, is necessary for a healthy civilization; '*the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture*' (63). Furthermore, the 'little vortex' of the unhistorical is the incubator of art, conquest, and revolution, 'the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too' (64). With hindsight, the unhistorical becomes the

suprahistorical, where 'the past and the present are one' and 'the world is complete', reaching 'its finality at each and every moment' (66).

Foucault is most interested in the third of Nietzsche's species of history, critical history. In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' Foucault formulates his model of history as genealogy, based on descent and emergence, and explains and justifies the postmodern metamorphosis of Nietzsche's three modalities. The 'veneration of monuments becomes parody', directed against reality; 'the respect for ancient continuities becomes systematic dissociation', directed against identity; the 'critique of the injustices of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge' (Foucault 97). History is reduced to parodic mimicry, the indiscriminate veneration of particularity (which foregrounds heterogeneity and discontinuity, thereby undermining identity), or the will to power, supported by the partiality of critique. In place of these discredited or discreditable models, however, Foucault offers the alternatives of 'archaeology' and genealogy. Archaeology 'takes cross-sections of the contradictory significance existing at any one time', exposing the 'discursive formation whose tolerance of these contradictions keeps itself in power' (Hamilton 138). Genealogy is the 'examination of *Herkunft*' (descent) and '*Entstehung*' (emergence), and its role is to record the 'history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts' and their emerging interpretations (Foucault 86). Taken together, a genealogical-archaeological historical sense can be used to 'construct a countermemory' (93), which takes account of the catastrophic unconnectedness of events, and sees the will to power as the solitary continuity within history.

Arguably, Woolf's novels, notably *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*, offer themselves as models of approximately this kind of historical sense, archaeological (more than

genealogical) counter-narratives, or counter-memories, cross-sections of history, tracing the arbitrary or contradictory elements making up a given temporal span. In Foucault's terms, they are historically 'effective' in that they shorten their vision to the nearby and the immediate, 'the body, the nervous system', the senses, and human energies and drives (89). The discursive discontinuities between the six monologuists of *The Waves*, for instance, their different ways of knowing their shared world, offer a counter-memory of a particular 'episteme', which could be crudely characterized in terms of the contradictions thrown up by imperial decline. On one level, at least, the novel concerns itself with the responses of the six characters to Percival, the mythical opacity at the centre of the text, who represents the fading and increasingly anachronistic dynamics of empire. Each of the characters offers a different, and often contradictory, perspective: Bernard, the maker of phrases and stories, shares the problems of the historiographer, forever thwarted in his attempts at closure, and his search for the story of stories, the metanarrative which would make sense of history; Susan represents the generative fecundity of the mother, marginalised by orthodox history; Louis represents the alienated perspective of postcoloniality; Jinny's epistemology is founded in the body, based on eroticism and desire; Neville's way of knowing is informed by his homosexuality, predicated on the 'epistemology of the closet'; and Rhoda, faceless and disembodied, epitomises the dissociation of identity and the breakdown of chronological temporality, unable to make one moment merge into the next. Collectively, their monologues disclose the fissures and contradictions of modernity, the epistemological faultlines of a particular episteme, offering a counter-memory of the incipient disintegration of imperialism between the wars.

Again in Foucauldian terms, *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the relationship between historical trauma and historical amnesia, between radical discontinuity and over-determined assertions of continuity. The disturbing and incompatible mixture of

remembering and forgetting characterizing the epistemic shift from war to peace, pre-war innocence to post-traumatic dissociation, is inscribed in the ontological collapse of Septimus Smith and the strained normality of the Dalloways. Indeed, the psychotic episodes of Septimus Smith in themselves, which often feature both delusions of grandeur and hyperaesthetic sensitivity to the particularity of sensory stimuli, ironically foreground the deficiencies of, and contradictions between, Nietzsche's 'monumental' and 'antiquarian' models of history, in Foucault's terms, between parody and the dissociation of identity.

9. The return of the voice

For both feminist and postcolonial writings, the recovery of an oral tradition, and the voice within the written word, represents a strategy for historicizing history's erasures, without forfeiting literary or 'writerly credentials', as Hamilton puts it (149). As we have seen, Kristeva's theories of the semiotic valorize meanings 'which lie adjacent to official stories', those 'traces of an unconscious, prior to sexual differentiation, which physically transgress in rhythm and impulse the strict demarcations of standard uses of language' (Hamilton 198). The semiotic is a kind of countermemory, qualifying, subverting and complementing official historical narratives, but it also makes it possible to listen to what has been marginalised and erased. Similarly, much postcolonial writing opposes the 'writerliness' of the canonical eurocentric tradition with an emphasis on an oral heritage, an aural archive, setting the 'speakerly' against the hegemonic written tradition. The discovery of a voice becomes an act of historical reclamation, giving postcolonial mimicry and mockery a peculiarly vocal immediacy.

Recent trauma theory, too, is concerned with the historical veracity of the voice, more specifically of spoken testimony and its special relationship to witnessing.

Shoshana Felman, in her essay 'The Return of the Voice', attempts to validate witnessing as a privileged form of history by analysing Claude Lanzmann's film about the Holocaust, *Shoah*.²⁰ The witness, Felman argues, is irreplaceable and incommensurable, fundamental to western laws of evidence, but art can amplify and expand witness testimony. She sees the Holocaust as the ultimate attempt to erase the witness, an assault on seeing, an event designed to be invisible, and the film *Shoah* as a 'resurrection' of witnessing, a 'decanonization of the Holocaust for the sake of its previously impossible historicization' (Felman 219). The role of the historian becomes that of translator, or second degree witness, while the film-maker Lanzmann assumes the triple function of narrator, interviewer and inquirer. As narrator, the film-maker is essentially a listener, and a bearer of the film's silences. As interviewer, his role is to 'break the silence', while as inquirer he attempts to reconstruct and resurrect specificity.

The Holocaust, however, implies unique problems for the process of witnessing. From the 'inside', from the point of view of survivors of the Concentration Camps, testimony becomes 'impossible' because '*the inside has no voice*', it is 'unintelligible' and '*inconceivable* even to the ones who are already in' (231). As 'the locus of a silence and as the vanishing point of the voice, the inside is *untransmittable*' (231). From the outside, testimony is equally impossible, 'entirely *ungraspable*', remaining 'the truth of an *exclusion*' (232). The film, therefore, locates its 'testimonial effort' both inside and outside, and between the two. This interjacency hinges on the testimony of Jan Karski, who visited the Warsaw Ghetto on two occasions, crossing the threshold between inside and outside, and taking upon himself a 'discipleship in trauma' (237). Overall, 'the film as a visual medium hinges, paradoxically, not so much on the self-evidence of sight as on the visibility it renders to the voice, and on the invisibility it renders tangible, of silence' (278). According to Felman, the song of the witness Srebnik makes 'the referent come

back, paradoxically, as something heretofore unseen by history' (276), simultaneously empowering and 'condemning' (282) the audience to hearing.

Like Lanzmann, Woolf is a listening narrator attempting to resurrect the specificity of experience, to make visible what has been erased, and to make audible that which has been silenced or ignored. She also occupies a series of interjacent narrative positions, between interiority and exteriority, centre and margins, semiotic and symbolic, allowing silences and ellisions to speak, orchestrating testimony to what cannot be said, enabling and 'condemning' us to hear what has gone unheard, and testifying to the fact that 'erasure' is itself part of the functioning of our history' (Felman 253).

NOTES

1. 'The Art of Noises' Luigi Russolo, *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umberto Apollonio, Thames and Hudson, London 1973.

2. See Stephen Connor's essay *The Modern Auditory I*, *Rewriting the Self*, Ed. Roy Porter, Routledge, 1997. p. 210.

3. Derrida, Jacques. 'Tympan', Introduction to *The Margins of Philosophy. A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. Ed. Kamuf, Peggy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

4. Ibid., p.147.

5. Derrida, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Texts and discussions with Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Christie McDonald. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

6. Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror : The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

7. Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, p. 283.

8. de Man, Paul. 'The Epistemology of Metaphor': *Aesthetic Ideology*. Ed. Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

9. See Andrzej Warminski's Introduction to *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 11.

10. Derrida, Jacques. Ibid., p.7.

11. Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. London: Faber, 1990.

12. Bhabha, Homi K. 'DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation.' *Nation and Narration*, Ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.

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14. Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington, Rachel Bowlby. Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1991. First published Paris: Editions Galilee as *L'Inhuman: Causeries sur le temps*, 1988. p. 174.
15. Bowlby, Rachel. *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
16. Kristeva, Julia. *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
17. See Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*. London / New York: Routledge, 1996.
18. Foucault, Michel. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.' *A Foucault Reader*. New York: 1986.
19. Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.' *Untimely Meditations*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
20. Felman, Shoshana. 'The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.' *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York / London, 1992.

Colonial rhetoric and the maternal voice : deconstruction and disengagement in *The Voyage Out*

1. The ear and the Other

At the heart of Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* is a disengagement from the authority of the paternal word and an affirmation of the semiotic otherness of the maternal voice. The term semiotic, as used by Julia Kristeva, here refers to those primarily aural, vocal, or physical qualities within language, such as rhythm, stress, repetition, echo, silence, and so on, which inform and can disrupt "literal" signification, creating uncertainty, ambivalence and paradox, and destabilizing meaning. Kristeva distinguishes the semiotic, which she associates with the voice and body of the mother, from the symbolic, which is bound up with the paternal word and the law of the father. Since the semiotic arises from the preoedipal, pre-objectal, and pre-linguistic phase, however, it is essentially genderless, relating to the feminine rather than the female, as well as to the voice (and ear) rather than the word. It is installed within the subject as semiotic disposition, a latency which is repressed once the infant enters into the symbolic code, but which can be activated by exposure to the pressures within language referred to above. The semiotic and the symbolic are therefore symbiotic and complementary, with the semiotic acting, so to speak, as the "Other" of language, responsible for its inherent rhetoricity, for its affect.

The disengagement in *The Voyage Out*, from the paternal word, or symbolic code, emerges out of the persistent defeat of verbalization, heard in the curiously frustrated conversations and abortive utterances of the characters, and particularly in the sterile rhetoric of the Dalloways, who epitomise the complacency of colonialism. Deconstruction of the paternal word also manifests itself in tropes relating to sound. There is an insistent focus on the brutal, mechanistic noises of

industry, the alienating effects of new acoustic technologies (such as the telephone and the phonograph), and the primordial din of the jungles of South America, which ultimately undermines the coherence of colonial, patriarchal language. Thus an affirmation of the maternal voice is aligned with a subtle and cumulative interrogation of the hollowness of the colonial enterprise itself.

The text's disenchantment with conventional rhetoric and social intercourse culminates, during the up-river sequence, in a stylized collapse of signification, a symbolic divestiture of the word, while there is a reciprocal investment in the purely vocal, as well as a gathering awareness throughout the text of the disruptive and uncanny power of sound. Simultaneously, the assumed impregnability of colonialism and the symbolic code is challenged in the indifferent otherness of the jungle. The way the novel develops can therefore be characterised as a response to the confining nature of its own language, so that there is a movement through and out of the discursive vapidness of colonial rhetoric and the paternal word, and towards a reinstatement of the maternal voice. The semiotic stealthily emerges from the symbolic as the novel proceeds.

Dissension from the authority of the paternal word and realignment with the Other of the maternal voice occur most disruptively and explicitly towards the end of the novel, with the journey up-river and finally with Rachel's death, but the ground is prepared earlier by the way in which imperial or colonial rhetoric is allowed to deconstruct and destabilize itself throughout the text. The reading process is progressively a listening process where we increasingly share Woolf's acute ear for the concealed weaknesses and topological instability of apparently uncontroversial rhetorical formulations. The unravelling of the authority of colonial rhetoric centers around two particular tropes, the figure of inside / outside, and the metaphor of the state as machine. We are partly alerted to this rhetorical self-

deconstruction through its accompaniment by what might be characterised as a “soundtrack,” the increasingly insistent inscriptions within the narrative of inhuman noise and non-verbal vocalisations, so that the apparent coherence of the symbolic code is eroded by the alterity of sound and the increasingly explicit emergence of the semiotic.

There is also a sense of aberration and imminent catastrophe in the implied dissolution of boundaries between human and inhuman, in the concussions of engines and the creaking and throbbing of machinery, in the “melancholy moan” (9) of the steamer and the alien sounds of ocean and jungle. The instantaneity of such sounds produces a special sort of unmediated registration of history.¹

Without Woolf necessarily being in a position to construct an explicit critique, the “ear” of the author detects and records the traces of industrial capitalism’s structural and historical crises, as well as the dissonances and fissures inherent in the colonial enterprise itself. If history, or referentiality, is to be found anywhere, it is perhaps through the open, undefended orifice of the ear. The continuous assimilatory operations of the ear predispose it to the detection of discord in rhetoric and what Barthes calls the “pulsional incidents” (*The Pleasure of the Text* 66-67) within language, those rhythms, percussions and discords which subvert the assumed transparency and infallibility of the paternal word. Things can sound wrong even when they look right, and, in this respect, *The Voyage Out* is a novel which listens to itself in an increasingly puzzled and dissatisfied way. This discussion will also suggest that the development of new acoustic technologies, such as the telephone and the gramophone, pose an additional threat to the integrity and immunity of the word, in that they enable its ironic duplication and alienating and subversive exteriorization.

2. Embarkation / extrication

The title of Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, asks to be listened to and interrogated. As an announcement of what is to follow, it stipulates a movement from an inside to an outside, a passage through or across boundaries, while leaving the nature of the "voyage," the place of departure and the destination obscure. In fact, the definite article, affirming the singularity of the journey, seems the most stable and solid element of the title. "Out" is a sweeping deictic gesture towards what Homi Bhabha calls the "beyond,"² indicating everything that is not "in," and animating, in the process, all of the epistemological implications and problems of the opposition inside / outside. Boundaries to be traversed, the reader might suppose, could include those between home and the wider world, between interiority and exteriority, between known center and exotic periphery, or perhaps between the patriarchal establishment and some other, oppositional space.

The title also suggests a setting forth into language, the initiation of the author into the public domain of literary production, as well as the embarkation of the reader into the unknown terrain of the text, both of which could be seen as acts of colonization as well as inauguration. In addition, the title suggests a potential voyage back to complete the project, the protagonist returning perhaps transfigured and enriched, to the overall aggrandisement of the "inside" and the impoverishment of the "outside." The fact that the novel confounds this lurking expectation and withholds the voyage back is one measure of the nature of its engagement with the rhetoric of colonialism and the discursive mechanisms of empire, indicating that the outward movement has not merely been an exotic, voyeuristic, or therapeutic sortie in pursuit of the rejuvenation of the paternal word, but a more permanent evacuation from that dominant rhetoric. Once "out," we remain out. In this sense Virginia Woolf's first novel is an act of extrication.

The actual process of embarkation is interestingly handled by Woolf. The somewhat stilted and disjointed small talk between the characters includes some significant remarks about “putting things off” and the difficulty of setting out. Ridley Ambrose confesses to having a “weakness for people who can’t begin,” (10) while the rapid changes of conversational topic, the interruptions, the unfinished sentences, and the dashes and dotted lines, suggest not only what Lucio Ruotolo describes as a “dynamic of disjunction,” (*The Interrupted Moment* 99)³ but the problem of embarking on the fictional project itself. The value of setting out, the very fact of movement, and of extrication from a paralysing social and cultural tradition would seem to be symbolised by the image of London as seen from the river. To Rachel it “seemed dreadful that the town should blaze forever in the same spot...a circumscribed mound, eternally burnt, eternally scarred... a sedentary miser.” (11) Her impression of the city at once suggests the relentless, combustible activity of patriarchal capitalism, and its intrinsically self-consuming, self-defeating processes.

Once the *Euphrosyne* is at sea, there is a “long interval of constraint and silence,” (15) signalling a shift in the register, substance and continuity of conversation. Replacing the trivial and disjointed exchanges that had gone before, Mr. Pepper begins a sustained “discourse, addressed to nobody,” describing “the great white monsters of the lower waters...which would explode if you brought them to the surface,” introducing a primordial otherness which Woolf will explore in more detail in the South American sequences. Echoing the start of Marlow’s narrative in *Heart of Darkness*, Mr. Pepper adopts the posture of a “Buddha,” with his “arms encircling his knees,” (15-16) further establishing the colonial theme by explaining how he was “condemned to pass the susceptible years of youth in a railway station in Bombay.” (18) Presently, all of the passengers follow Helen Ambrose onto the deck to discover that the “ship was out in a wide space of sea.” They realise that

they are “free of roads, free of mankind,” (20) and the process of extrication, for novelist as well as characters, has begun.

3. The Imperial Machine

To be on the inside of the British Empire, the novel suggests, means to be an organism within a machine, to be, in other words, the subject of a mixed metaphor. Richard Dalloway provides an explicit, if inadvertent, exposition of this paradoxical and unstable predicament during his patronising catechism of Rachel Vinrace in chapter four of the novel:

I can conceive of no more exalted aim - to be the citizen of the Empire. Look at it in this way, Miss Vinrace; conceive the state as a complicated machine; some fulfil the important duties; others (perhaps I am one of them) serve only to connect some obscure parts of the mechanism, concealed from the public eye. Yet if the meanest screw fails in its task, the proper working of the whole is imperilled. (57)

Immediately prior to this, though, Dalloway has insisted that a “human being is not a set of compartments, but an organism.” The imperial subject, therefore, in the formulation of a declared agent of Empire, is an organism performing the function of a screw in a machine. Rachel’s attempt to visualize this hybrid rhetorical aberration, the human subject, a “lean black widow, gazing out of her window,” fused together with the “vast machine” of which she is a component, collapses into the onomatopoeic registration of mechanised sound, the “thumping, thumping, thumping” of a machine “such as one sees at South Kensington.” (57)

For Rachel Vinrace, then, the Empire becomes an aberrant metaphor which dissolves into the intrusive alterity of throbbing, industrial noise. And this trope, once on the move, is difficult to stop. The pulse of the machine, imagined by

Rachel, reverberates like the beat of a heart, so that the machine itself is like an organism, and, conversely, the human subject like a machine. The word “thumping” reverberates like the sound it describes, referring back to itself in an apparent closed circuit. But a “thump” can also be a blow, an act of aggression against the person, so that the noise of the machine becomes an assault on one of its own “obscure parts,” striking at the organism which animates and infests it, through the delicate membrane of its ear. And this antagonism between automaton and human, the impulse of the former to attack and purge itself of the latter, surely accurately describes the unsustainable relationship between the industrial-imperial complex and its constituent subjects. The brutality and alienation of the industrial process, its travesty of human rhythms and social practices, is concealed from view, but is heard, nonetheless. (It is worth recalling, at this point, that Woolf frequently describes the experience of the human subject in the modern world in terms of delicate membranes and concussive ‘sledge-hammer’ blows, notably in “A Sketch of the Past” 78).

This disturbing catachresis, picturing the state as machine held together with organic components, seems to oscillate its way back to itself, very much following the circular trajectory that Paul de Man predicts for all substitutional tropes in *The Epistemology of Metaphor*.⁴ The substitutional structure of a metaphor, its inherent translatability, creates a “perpetual motion that never moves beyond tautology,” (38) so that its attempt at definition is doomed to futile circularity or oscillation, just as the metaphors unleashed by Richard Dalloway rehearse the pointless perpetual motion of the industrial-imperial process he is attempting to valorize.

Asked earlier by Rachel to express his “ideal,” Dalloway replies “Unity. Unity of aim, of dominion, of progress. The dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area.” (55) This utterance has the compact rhythms of rehearsed rhetoric, the sterile

received wisdom of the paternal word, and, while appearing to epitomise the imperial ideal, once again suggests the monolithic operations of a machine. The repetition of the word “unity” and the rhythmical accumulation of adverbial phrases, in sonorous triplicate, seem to replicate the inflexible purpose and inexorable momentum of the imperial enterprise, while the balance of superlatives in the second sentence suggests an inarguable logic. It is a rhetorical formulation designed to be self-containing, air-tight, structured to prohibit the pursuit and full realisation of the very tropes it sets in motion and from which it derives its authority as utterance. Like most rhetoric, however, it can be shown to be self-sabotaging, vulnerable to the “other” logic of grammar.

The mere repetition of the word “unity,” which on one level insists on the integrity and singularity of the concept, also represents a duplication, a splitting or pluralisation at odds with the intention of the word’s reiteration. Moreover, on closer inspection, “unity” and “dispersion” resonate as antithetical impulses, while “dominion” and “progress” can scarcely claim any automatic affinity. “Dominion” still carries traces of its archaic, feudal, etymological ancestry, translating as sovereignty, an absolute and intrinsically static condition, whereas “progress” connotes perpetual advancement, owing its peculiarly aggressive technological associations to an American rehabilitation of the obsolete English verb form. In a nicely circular irony, American social, economic and technological progress only really took off when America ceased to be a colony, or “dominion,” of Britain. This tension, or incompatibility between “dominion” and “progress,” therefore, further undermines the coherence of the original proposition, “unity of aim,” the rhetorical formulation unravelling in a way that is analogous to the eventual historical disintegration of the British Empire itself.

The self-cancelling dynamic which exists between “unity” and “dispersion” is more

neatly encapsulated in an image from *Between the Acts*, of the onomatopoeic scratching of a gramophone, which repeatedly gurgles “*Unity- dispersity*,” (119) ⁵ an image of suspension, paralysis even, with the machine itself stuck in deadlock between the centrifugal spin of the disc and the centripetal trajectory of the needle arm. Furthermore, while the gramophone seems to capture, mimic and exploit sound, it also splits that sound off from its originary source, separating, for example, the human voice from the body and the self, transforming it into a kind of uncanny simulacrum, or virtual voice. Homi Bhabha has shown how an analogous pattern of duplication or mimicry takes place in the practices and discourses of colonialism, so that “mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise” between ‘the synchronic panoptical vision of domination - the demand for identity, stasis - and the counter pressure of the diachrony of history - change, difference...” (*The Location of Culture* 86) Concealed within Richard Dalloway’s glib rhetoric of “dominion” and “progress,” therefore, are the very dispersive, antagonistic forces which will ultimately explode the ‘unity’ which is his cherished ideal.

When Richard Dalloway goes on to assert that “no woman” has “statesmanship,” or “the political instinct” (58) he commits himself to another, rather more self-evident tautology (namely that women do not advertise attributes in themselves which have been prohibited, that they are outside of something into which they have not been admitted), but this also has the effect of spurring Rachel into a more coherent and forward-looking elucidation of the “machine” of the state than Richard himself was able to muster:

Under the streets, in the sewers, in the wires, in the telephones, there is something alive; is that what you mean? (58)

In Rachel’s formulation, Dalloway’s grotesque organism as screw figure modulates into something more like a ghost in the machine, anticipating the virtual spaces and

the rhetoric of intersections and networks typical of modernity and postmodernity. Whereas his imagery dwells on the mechanics of industrial production, evoking the “thumping” of steam engines, she looks to the revolution in communications, particularly imagining the new acoustic technologies for the long-range transmission of language and the human voice.

Steven Connor, in his essay “The Modern Auditory I,” has suggested how the development of the telephone contributed to a conceptual reconfiguration of space, its simultaneous “immensification” and collapse, leading to the paradoxical experience of a remote intimacy, along with the increasing familiarity of the virtual space of the “switchboard,” inhabited by a spectral operator. (211)⁶ Certainly there is a more sophisticated spatialization of the imperial machine in Rachel’s description, with its sense of the subterranean and overhead dimensions and multiple technologies involved in sustaining, connecting and modernizing a global empire. There is also, though, a strong hint of the sentient, suggesting the monstrosity of the intelligent and self-serving machine. The phonemic patterning and the parallelism of phrase vocalise a concealed anxiety about the momentum and acceleration of this technological revolution. This sense of a monstrous, entropic potential is more explicitly articulated later, when Rachel expresses the belief that “the world might change in a minute and anything appear.” (132)

In *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf more fully registers the potentially alienating properties of new acoustic technology, the “distancing and exteriorization,” which introduce “absence, spacing and exorbitance into the voice.” (Connor 217)

And the telephones ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last cards are dealt and the days are over. ‘Try to penetrate,’ for as we lift the cup, shake the hand, express the hope, something whispers, Is this all? (JR 80)

While Woolf here sees something affirmative in the will to communicate, the insistence of the phrase “try to penetrate” also suggests the invasiveness of acoustic technology, its destabilization of the inside / outside opposition, while the image of encirclement by “wires and tubes” implies captivity, hinting at the general pervasiveness of the auditory and the peculiar vulnerability of the ear. The sinuous and stealthy proliferation of acoustic technology, juxtaposed with the finite and fleeting “days” of the human subject, here seems to suggest something malign and sinister about the living machine invoked earlier by Rachel Vinrace.

At the heart of any machine is the motor or engine, and the metropolis is the engine at the heart of the imperial machine. Like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, *The Voyage Out* begins in London, the epicentre of English imperialism, and on the Thames, its main artery. Whereas Conrad’s metropolis “broods” motionless and silent under a “mournful gloom,” already somewhat remote from Gravesend where the *Nellie* is actually moored, Woolf’s London is more immediate, more fully realised as a place of frenetic activity and strident, disorganised, and invasive noise. “Shooting motor cars,” “thundering drays” and “jingling hansoms” break the ‘fixity’ of Mrs. Ambrose’s stricken mood, as she makes her way to the river, reminding her of “the world she lived in,” (5) a world on the cusp of a modernity where horse and combustion engine, organism and machine, still uneasily co-exist at the service of the greater engine of the state. For most of the opening sequence, though, Mrs. Ambrose moves through the city in a state of distress and disorientation, her vision blurred by the “tremulous medium” of tears, an optical interference which renders her more reliant on the aural, and more susceptible to the alterity of noises, whose origins cannot be visually confirmed.

She is strangely dissociated from her husband, whose disembodied voice, imperviously reciting poetry, “struck close upon her ears.” Again, the apprehension

of sound by the subject is rendered in terms of a blow, in a trope which, as it were, merely masquerades as a metaphor and quickly confesses its tautological nature, since the idea of sound “striking” the ear literally describes the miniaturised concussive violence involved in hearing. Derrida has observed that “the ear is the most tendered and open organ,” the one that “the infant cannot close,” an undefendable conduit between inside and outside, also noting its “invaginated folds” and “involuted orificiality.” (“Otobiographies” 36)⁷ Recalling the penetrative quality of sound foregrounded in the passage quoted earlier from *Jacob’s Room*, the apparent transparency of the image of Mr Ambrose’s voice striking into his wife’s ears now clouds over again with suggestions of penetrative intrusion and the uninvited colonisation of another’s bodily and psychic space. That her husband is intoning a fragment of popular Victorian poetry, the opening lines of one of the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, by Thomas Babington Macaulay (along with incidental references to the Sphinx, Constantinople and Waterloo Bridge), would appear to strengthen the presence of empire and coloniality in the language of this brief episode. We are reminded that colonisation and the “dominion” of the paternal word begin at home and include an intimate, interpersonal dimension.

As the voyage out finally gets under way, Mr. Pepper and Ridley Ambrose are conducting an apparently incidental conversation about a shared Cambridge acquaintance, “Jenkinson of Peterhouse,” when the aberrant concatenation of the mechanical and the organic surfaces again. Jenkinson is described as having “a screw loose somewhere,” a metaphor equating mind and machine and anticipating Richard Dalloway’s subsequent conceptualization of the state as an apparatus dependent upon “the meanest screw.” It turns out that Jenkinson’s “loose screw” amounts to little more than social and intellectual nonconformism, that “he married a young woman out of a tobacconist’s,” produced an unorthodox “theory about the planets,” and took to “drink” and “drugs.” (9) As a part of the greater machine,

though, Jenkinson is malfunctioning, with the fault located within the condemned component, rather than outside in the wider operations of the supposedly infallible social apparatus.

Interestingly, Mr. Pepper's remark seems to activate the machinery of the ship, which manifests itself in noise and vibration, a "tremor" through the table, an "electric bell" ringing "sharply again and again," and a "loud melancholy moan" which is answered by other equally "sad" ships on the river. The metaphor of an organism with a loose screw is therefore succeeded by the prosopopoeia of the machine with a voice, whose melancholy utterance is itself mocked by the "chuckling and hissing" (9) of the water as the voyage gets under way. The passengers are now confined to the micro-world of the ship, a miniature island state that is quite literally a machine, and when, later, the "sinister grey" (60) shapes of warships are spotted on the horizon, we are reminded that the imminent consequences of Dalloway's mixed metaphor, the machine-organism aberration, will be the mass production of death in the first industrial war, a war of cavalry and tanks.

Once again, these small traces of history, lodged in the rhetorical tropes of *The Voyage Out*, are more fully articulated in the soundscapes of *Jacob's Room*. There are many passages where Woolf seems concerned to indicate the simultaneous stasis and ephemerality of the moment through a concentrated documentation of sounds and overheard voices. In one such sequence, Fanny Elmer, sitting on a bench at "Hampstead Garden Suburb," is assailed by random and inescapable noise: "A dog barked, barked, barked down in the hollow," and "went on barking," while "motor cars hooted on the road:" there is a "far away rush and humming," and children are "screaming," while the wind scatters their "voices all about;" she hears "some cry," then a "workman's whistle," a "thrush trilling out

into the warm air,” and then “the humming of wheels and the wind rushing.” (JR 102-3) Behind it all the war resonates quietly like a background drone.

As in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf meditates in the later novel on the sounds of the machines that make up the larger mechanism of the empire, the “steamers, resounding like gigantic tuning forks,” which “state the old old fact - how there is a sea coldly, greenly, swaying outside.” The otherness of the sea, outside of the vessel, is clearly registered here, but she seems more concerned to discriminate the acoustic nuances of nationalism, or patriotism, “in the thin voice of duty, piping in a white thread from the top of a funnel,” and to observe that “nowadays” it is military vessels that “collect the largest multitudes.” Night becomes “nothing but a long-drawn sigh between hammer-strokes, a deep breath - you can hear it from an open window even in the heart of London.” (JR 142) Once again, the machine of the state makes itself *heard*, in the brutal, repetitive percussions of mass production, and, by its absence, in the organic human “sigh” of nocturnal remission from its pervasive noise.

4. Inside and outside

Returning to *The Voyage Out*, and the inside / outside motif, the structures, protocols and practices of English society are duplicated and miniaturised aboard the *Euphrosyne* as it steams into the “empty universe” of the ocean, its passengers cocooned from the unknown, elemental outside. This simultaneous replication of, and removal from, the center, from the imperial homeland, provokes a rupture in the way the diegetic narrative voice imagines England. On the one hand, it is recalled nostalgically in terms of a pastoral idyll of village churches, blooming gardens and genteel domesticated contentment, diegetic detachment combining with anonymous and generalised mimetic utterances. On the other hand, with the

narrative voice now loosely affiliated with the generality of “people in ships,” England becomes a “shrinking island in which people were imprisoned,” “swarming about like aimless ants.” (23-24) In both scenarios, the landscape is also imagined as soundscape, a symptom partly of its invisibility from the ship, but also a measure of the way in which nationhood is substantially the product of utterance and rhetoric, the patriarchal word, notable here in that the acoustic details of these soundscapes are predominantly vocalic.

The first motif, the pastoral idealization of England, evokes a sonorous space of intimate utterances, ecstatic cries and whispers, “confidences and expressions of love that were heard not only in cornfields but in lamplit rooms,” (24) a remote aural voyeurism that curiously resembles the intrusions later associated with the hidden microphone. Odd echoes of Darwinian or atheistical controversy infiltrate this gentle national soundscape, softened by the filter of nostalgic idyll, and imagined as generalised and stylized exchanges, with “some” people saying “that the sky was an emblem of the life they had had” and others “that it was the promise of the life to come.” (24) As if to register the underlying crisis of certainty, which, from a vantage point “outside,” seems to afflict the national psyche, the mellow pastoral tones are shattered by an exotic image of “long-tailed birds” which “clattered and screamed, and crossed from wood to wood, with golden eyes in their plumage,” a cacophonous reminder of alien, but related species, and a submerged prehistory which will be more fully encountered later in the novel.

The version of England as “swarming” prison, in contrast to the intimate utterances of the preceding pastoral soundscape, is registered as a “vain clamour, which being unheard, either ceased, or rose into a brawl.” “Clamour” and “brawl” suggest inarticulate, public, and collective noise, voices without words, but noise that is “vain” and strangely “unheard,” (24) whereas the private sweet nothings of rural

England are mysteriously audible and intelligible. The uneven reception of these imagined noises, reaching the outside from the center, suggests England's segmentation into sound-proofed, mutually incomprehensible enclaves, a kind of acoustic simulation of its social, cultural and political divisions, which is thoroughly at odds with Richard Dalloway's subsequent assertion of the supposed "unity" underlying the whole national and imperial enterprise.

Presently, England is remote enough for its people to be "completely mute," (24) an observation which anticipates subsequent episodes of speechlessness and silence amongst the tourists in the South American episodes. It is only with the arrival on board of the Dalloways that the relatively progressive and enlightened attitudes of the existing passengers are thrown into relief, and the pre-war political antagonisms between Liberals and Conservatives are rehearsed within the micro-society of the ship. For Clarissa Dalloway, the experience of being in the "beyond" provokes a vague and revealing idealization of 'what it really means to be English':

One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending our boys from little country villages - and of men like you Dick, and it makes one feel as if one couldn't bear *not* to be English! (42)

The curiously unconvincing effect of this formulation, the sense of a baffled rhetorical impotence, would appear to be a good example of what de Man calls "referential aberration" or "aberrant referentiality," ("The Epistemology of Metaphor" 47) where rhetoric and grammar sabotage each other to produce a historically meaningful distortion or cancellation of meaning.

To start with, the grammatical discontinuities and phonemic dissonances undermine the central proposition about continuity. The opening assertion hinges

on the verb “done” (“One thinks of all we’ve done...”), denoting actions successfully accomplished, a rhetorical gambit that promises verb-dominated, equally actional development and elaboration. Instead it is succeeded by a verbless noun-phrase (“and our navies...”), which, instead of evoking heroic deeds, suggests inertia or invisibility, the verb being conspicuously, or audibly, absent. The grammatical discontinuity releases a certain absurdity at the level of the signified, implying either the immobility of the “navies,” or the impenetrable secrecy of their activities.

The elision of the verb from the next noun phrase (“and the people in India and Africa...”) further mystifies the nature of the accomplished actions which the opening assertion promised to illuminate, while the absence of any semantic link between the adjacent phrases reveals an equivalent referential incongruity, the historically arbitrary contiguity of British “navies” and the “people in India and Africa.” By the time the explicit exposition of continuity arrives (“and how we’ve gone on century after century...”), what had evidently started out as rhetorical affirmation has become an utterance in pursuit of its own self-justification, in danger of collapsing into its own absences. The repetition of the word “century,” instead of evoking diachrony, only further betrays the precarious instantaneity of the utterance, its vocalic ephemerality. The deictic gesture towards Dick seems like a desperate diversionary tactic in this context, allowing Clarissa to reach the double negative of her entirely unjustified peroration with some illusory semblance of coherence. The preponderance of conjunctions throughout the passage simulates a breathless orality, but instead of assembling a cumulative rationale enacts its ceaseless deferral, while the juxtaposition of impersonal and collective pronouns inscribes social division rather than national solidarity. Instead of constructing a justification of English imperialism, then, Clarissa Dalloway’s rhetorical essay has deconstructed itself, disclosing the arbitrariness of colonialism and the fissures within English society itself.

Following the rhetorical and grammatical discontinuities of Clarissa's utterances, Woolf pushes the satire further, and has Richard Dalloway imagining the continuity his wife has attempted to evoke, but this time in starkly linear terms, with the complexity of history being reduced to simple chronological succession. In fact, linearity itself dwindles to the mere superstition of lineage and the unquestioning reiteration of the paternal word, in the incantatory formulation of "King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law." (43) Here, the profound inertia of self-duplicating and arbitrary sovereignty is revealed as absurd unconnected repetition, the phonemes detonating like the 'thumping' of the insentient machine imagined by Rachel.

5. Colonial rhetoric and the sonorous envelope

Woolf establishes the South American colonial location in the novel through the use of a largely conventional and orthodox imperial rhetoric, conforming closely to aspects of the schematization formulated by David Spurr in his book *The Rhetoric of Empire*.⁸ The excursion to Monte Rosa, for example, is a miniature reenactment of the original colonial enterprise, permitting a masterful visual surveillance of the "infinite distances of South America." (120) When Evelyn exclaims "Splendid!" and Miss Allan registers the points of the compass, "North - South - East - West," they complete a concise description and aestheticization of the scene, thereby taking discursive possession of it and subordinating it to the "power of the speaker." (Spurr 18)

A similar moment of surveillance opens chapter XVI, with Rachel and Hewet positioned on the edge of a cliff and therefore able to gaze both inland and seaward. Other imperial rhetorical strategies come into play here, with the inland gaze registering the nameless villages and hills as "negative space," part of a

wider strategy of negation which, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, characterizes uncolonized lands as “blank spaces of the earth,” (33) inviting occupation and the discursive mastery implicit in naming. Thus the view is recorded in terms of its emptiness and namelessness, a space of “infinite sun-dried earth...like the immense floor of the sea,” (194) devoid of language and history, and ready to be “naturalized” or “aestheticized” and “charged with any one of a number of values: nature as abundance, as absence, as original innocence, as unbridled destruction, as eternal cycle, as constant progression.” (Spurr 168) When the view is turned seaward, there is an explicit inversion of Conrad’s description of the Thames as “a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth,” (28) with the sea this time nostalgically envisaged as flowing “up to the mouth of the Thames” which “washed the roots of the city of London,” the marine medium operating in both cases as a kind of invitation to adventure, colonization, and the dissemination of the paternal word.

With the Conradian journey up-river in Chapter XX, however, the imperial rhetoric undergoes a singular dissolution or loss of affect. The rhetorical strategies of “insubstantialization” and “eroticization,” discursive responses to an encounter with the alterity of so-called primitive cultures, are afflicted by a progressive disembodiment, fragmentation and unintelligibility of the speaking voice. By “insubstantialization,” Spurr means the disorienting or joyful dissolution of the subject into a semi-hallucinatory state, often presented in terms of the rhetoric of the “visionary experience,” and accompanied by “surrender, submission or abandonment” on the part of the subject. (Spurr 145) Chapter XX of *The Voyage Out* certainly has this hallucinated quality, strikingly registered in the otherness of the acoustic details, the “croakings” and “sudden cries” of animals, the “flapping of great wings,” and pervasive “creaking and sighing sounds,” (256-7) along with equally disturbing episodes of silence. The wilderness is also erotically charged

with a superabundance of colour, of animal and vegetable fecundity, again in accordance with Spurr's schematization of imperial rhetoric. Where Woolf deviates from this scheme, or at least gives it a distinctly anti-colonial orientation, is in the progressive disintegration of meaningful utterance, the incipient collapse of the symbolic order, and the creeping incapacity of the spoken word to carry meaning between one human subject and another. In a return to the prehistory of the subject, the rhetoric of the imperial machine, the authority of the paternal word, is supplanted by the "sonorous envelope" of the maternal voice.

Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror*,⁹ provides a concise summary of some of the positions taken regarding the role of the maternal voice in the formation of the subject. Central to all of the perspectives identified by Silverman is the idea of a kind of acoustic cocoon woven around the newborn infant by the sound of the mother's voice, and variously characterized as a "bath of sounds" (Didier Anzieu), a "sonorous envelope," (Guy Rosalato and Mary Ann Doane), an "umbilical net" (Michel Chion) and a "mobile receptacle" (Julia Kristeva's more familiar *chora*). Silverman characterises the sonorous envelope and the umbilical net as the utopian and dystopian extremes amongst these retrospective conceptualizations of the maternal voice. The former sees the space created by the maternal voice as an envelope of blissful, "operatic" plenitude and "celestial melody," a "primordial listening experience" which is the "prototype for all subsequent auditory pleasure." (Silverman 84-5) Within the terms of this model, the maternal voice itself is a lost object, the lack of which accounts (along with other lost objects) for the subject's incompleteness and desire. Michel Chion's formulation, on the other hand, imagines the enclosure described by the maternal voice as a place of entrapment, an "umbilical net" or "cobweb," (Silverman 74) a "uterine night of nonmeaning," from which the infant is delivered by its entry into the symbolic code. Chion opposes the maternal voice and the paternal word, thereby identifying the "mother

with sound and the father with meaning.” (Silverman 75) Once securely situated outside of the umbilical web, the subject comes to associate the maternal voice with infantile babble, the “vocal and auditory afterbirth” (81) which has been repudiated by the paternal word. Silverman shows that both of these formulations hinge around the figure inside / outside, and that, for a movement from one to the other to be possible, for the infant to emerge outside of the sonorous envelope or umbilical net, an inside has to be left behind. The trope inside / outside, therefore, effectively abandons the mother in the space created by her own voice, in the auditory enclosure evacuated by the infant, imprisoned in nonmeaning, babble, and vocalic rather than verbal sonority. Silverman sees this as a “disavowal of the mother’s role both as an agent of discourse and as a model for linguistic identification,” as well as an “alignment of femininity with an unpleasurable and disempowering interiority.” (100)

Julia Kristeva’s ideas about the maternal voice also rely upon the trope inside / outside, though in a more complex and ambiguous way. The mother’s voice, along with “the breast, given and withdrawn” and “lamplight capturing the gaze,” (*Desire in Language*, 283)¹⁰ helps to constitute the primitive space of the *chora*, a term adapted from Plato to designate a “maternally connoted” receptacle, “improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming,” (133) and therefore suitably premature in relation to the paternal word or symbolic code. These archaic “markers” are the first co-ordinates of “spatiality,” and help to absorb and inhibit the first vocalizations or “distress calls” of the infant, which Kristeva calls “anaclices.” (282) At this stage “there is not yet an outside” or an inside, only the unity or totality of mother and infant. Clearly, at this point, the inside / outside opposition is under strain as a rhetorical formulation, even allowing for the fact that Kristeva is assuming the perspective of the infant. The figure, like all binary oppositions, is predicated on its symmetry, so that there must be an outside for there to be an inside. If there is neither, then identity

(including the identity of the signifier) is deprived of the materials out of which it makes itself. In one sense, therefore, the collapse of the trope into paradox is an entirely consistent function of the interdependence of the symbolic and semiotic regimes, and what Kristeva calls the improbability of the *chora*. Furthermore, Kristeva argues that the *chora* is sublimated once the subject has entered the symbolic code, as “semiotic disposition,” capable of reactivation as sublime or abject experience, thus surviving as the source of artistic and poetic sensibility. (*Powers of Horror* 208) As retrospective theorizations of origins, these ideas seem peculiarly relevant to the later episodes of Woolf’s novel, especially the up-river sequence, suggesting as it does an encounter with pre-history and the evolutionary past.

For Hewet and Rachel, the excursion into the wilderness becomes a sublime release from the symbolic order, an episode of remission from the authority of the paternal word and a re-experience of the maternal voice, a re-entry into the musical bliss of an originary acoustic cocoon. For Helen Ambrose, on the other hand, the experience is disturbing and uncanny, a presentiment of “disaster,” (270) a similar re-experience of the maternal voice, but this time as abjection or “uterine night.” This contrast to some extent reflects the dispositions of the relative characters with regard to the paternal word and the symbolic order, their respective levels of commitment to the structures and authority of the patriarchal machine, and therefore their degrees of anxiety at the withdrawal or dissolution of this authority.

As the party journeys up-river into the “darkness,” Hewet feels the boat “in some strange way” become “identified with himself”:

He was drawn on and on away from all he knew, slipping over barriers and past landmarks into unknown waters as the boat glided over the smooth surface of the river. In profound peace, enveloped in deeper unconsciousness than had been his for many nights, he lay on deck

watching the tree-tops... (252)

This passage clearly suggests the blissful plenitude of the more affirmative model of the sonorous envelope, a re-immersion in the preconscious or prenatal, Kristeva's "semiotic enclosure," or *chora*. His "baptism" seems to sensitize Hewet to the sounds of the forest which "echoed like a hall." The cries of animals are described in almost exclusively anthropomorphic terms, the "wild laugh" of a bird, the chuckling of a monkey, the shriek of a parrot, suggesting the paradoxical strangeness and familiarity of the wordless human voice, and connecting with the semiotic disposition latent within the subject. The progressive ascendancy of the purely vocal, the call of the Other, is paralleled by a reciprocal diminution and designification of the verbal. The words he tries to read "flicker[ed]" and go out (253), while the utterances of the others are increasingly registered as unintelligible murmurings and mutterings.

Helen Ambrose is similarly affected. Hirst's description of the forest as "beautiful" seems to her a "strange little word." (254) When Hewet and Rachel leave the others to explore the forest, and he attempts to talk to her, "he did not seem to be speaking or she to be hearing," and their voices join in "tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words." Rejoining the party, he finds himself "using curiously sharp, meaningless words," while their conversation consists of "little meaningless words floating high in the air." (262) As they near the native settlement, Rachel and Hewet try to recall their moment of intimacy in the forest, but "so beautiful was the sound of their voices that ...they scarcely listened to the words they framed," and they simply repeat each other's utterances, savouring the acoustic pleasure of echo over signification. Later, they comment that Helen has a "beautiful voice." (273) On board the ship, "words crossed the darkness, but, not knowing where they fell seemed to lack energy and substance." (271) "Broken

fragments of speech” reach them “in one vast wave.” (268) Language has dissolved into what Lucio Ruotolo has described as a “rhythm of broken sequence...an aesthetic of disjunction,” (*The Interrupted Moment* 2) a dynamic which will reach its apotheosis in *Between the Acts* . That they have momentarily re-entered originary, maternal spaces during their foray into the jungle would appear to be further symbolized by their movement up a “wide pathway striking through the forest,” towards “star-shaped crimson blossoms,” to the accompaniment of “creaking and sighing sounds.” (256)

For Helen, on the other hand, the defamiliarisation and designification of the verbal is “strange” and uncanny, and leaves her feeling “exposed to presentiments of disaster” for “having ventured too far and exposed themselves,” while the cries of the beasts strike her as “senseless.” (270) Instead of sublime musicality, she is subject to what Kristeva calls, in *Powers of Horror* , the “massive uncanniness” of abjection, (2)¹¹ menaced by the profound incompatibility (and paradoxical interdependence) of the semiotic and the symbolic codes, and by the evaporating coherence of the paternal word. Her most intense responses, her sense of defamiliarization and imminent catastrophe, are triggered by her encounter with the native people of the settlement, recalling Kristeva’s explanation of the reflex rejection of the “foreigner” in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* :

In the fascinated rejection that the foreigner arouses in us, there is a share of uncanny strangeness in the sense of the depersonalization that Freud discovered in it, and which takes up again our infantile desires and fears of the other - the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive. The foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious - that “impossible” facet of our “own and proper.” (91)

Helen’s presentiments of disaster and sense of unreality can therefore be seen as a reaction against the infantile, forgotten stranger within herself, whose half-

remembered encounter with the Other she can neither fully extinguish nor wholly assimilate. The foreign voices of the natives and the “cries of the senseless beasts” (270) activate incompletely sublimated memories of the maternal voice, this time figured as the horror of abjection, or the suffocating captivity of the umbilical web.

6. Music and the maternal voice

Rachel’s affirmation of sound over words is made explicit in Chapter XXII, where she denounces “novels and plays and histories” as “sheer nonsense” and challenges Hewet to “think of words compared with sounds!” (276) This completes an association of her character with music which has pervaded the whole text. This association is so emphatic that we are told she “was allowed to learn nothing but music,” to the extent that she becomes a “fanatic” (26) about it, to the exclusion of her wider educational, social and sexual development. Having been brought up by two aunts and having “few friends of her own age,” she is ignorant about sex, and does not “care for books,” coming across knowledge only in “repulsive chunks,” (27) suggesting a continuing attachment to childhood and an incomplete assimilation by the authority of the paternal word. This is supported by the numerous mother-figures Rachel encounters during the course of the novel, as well as by her evident apathy towards category, classification, and system. When describing William Pepper to her aunt, for example, her list of his accomplishments moves without irony from mathematics, history and the classics to coins and “vehicular traffic.” (12) Mr. Pepper’s pedantic and indiscriminate autodidacticism is the main target of Woolf’s irony, but the episode also establishes that Rachel remains relatively detached from “masculine” epistemological structures, hierarchies, and habits of thought.

The more utopian account of the sonorous envelope argues that the “primordial

listening experience" of the maternal voice is the "prototype for all subsequent auditory pleasure, especially the pleasure that derives from music." Rachel's musicality would appear to affiliate her from the start, therefore, with the semiotic chora, or what Guy Rosolato calls the "original atmosphere" of the "sonorous womb." ("La voix: entre corps et langage" 81)¹² Bach is her preferred composer, and it is his music that she plays at the close of the dance, shortly after the arrival in South America. It is also her musical sensibility which most forcibly distinguishes her from the Dalloways and helps her to reassert a critical distance from them, repulsing their attempts to absorb her into their imperial world-view. After one of Clarissa Dalloway's attempts to ingratiate herself goes wrong, for example, Rachel returns almost vengefully to her music, attacking some Bach, which rises in her mind as a "shape or building," so that she is amazed at "how all these sounds should stand together." (49) Kristeva begins *Strangers to Ourselves* by proposing Bach's music as a structural model which would enable an escape from hatred of the other through the "*harmonious* repetition of the differences it implies and spreads."

Bach's compositions evoke to my ears the meaning of an acknowledged and harrowing otherness that I should like to be contemporary, *because* it has been brought up, relieved, disseminated, inscribed in an original play being developed, without goal, without boundary, without end. An otherness barely touched upon and that already moves away. (3)

Kristeva here seems to be thinking of the invention, repetition and contrapuntalism characteristic of Bach's compositions, the internal logic of which suggests a potentially infinite development, where dissonances, harmonies, and partial resolutions are all part of a ceaseless and elusive progression. The otherness of Bach seems both inevitable and shocking, a music which seems to enact its own deconstruction, even as it disappears into the beyond.

It is tempting to see Kristeva's "harmonious repetition of difference," which Woolf describes in terms of "the rings of water spread from a fallen stone," (214) as related to the affirmative "operatic" model of the maternal voice. The maternal voice continues to haunt the subject, forever just out of reach, glimpsed as abject or sublime, as melodic counterpoint to the paternal word, or menacing disruption of the established order. For Rachel Vinrace, however, it is as if the semiotic chora has never been completely sublimated in the first place, as if the maternal voice continues to enclose her in a semi-permeable acoustic bubble, to be invoked or strengthened through music, and finally reactivated by the sounds of the jungle and the cry of the Other.

7. Extrication

Rachel's final movement out, beyond the reach of the paternal word, begins with the journey up-river, continues with the estrangement and abjection of illness, and is completed with her death. Her extrication from the symbolic code is also a movement in, however, an immersion in the unconscious and the disorder of aural and visual hallucination. As she loses consciousness, visitors to her sickbed "gabble unintelligibly," and she falls into a "deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head," hearing nothing "but a deep booming sound," (322) now completing a still more profound retreat, back into prenatal night and originary oblivion. Thus, she is not absorbed into the discursive and epistemological inside of the patriarchal machine, she does not learn and grow in the way that the novel initially indicated she would, but remains on the outside of the word, and on the inside of the protective enclosure cast by the maternal voice, allowing Woolf to accomplish analogous gestures of disengagement and reinstatement. The novel has enacted a discrete challenge to the symbolic code, to the masculine sentence, releasing what Silverman calls the "force that assails

language and meaning.” (104) At the same time as carefully “assailing” the paternal word, then, there is also a reaffirmation of acoustic affect, a rejuvenation of “sentence melody,” those “postposings, preposings, segmentations, displacements, repetitions, surges of the intonational curve” ‘ (*Desire in Language* 192) which constitute the semiotic dynamic.

Although there is a renewal of discursive interaction and intelligibility of utterance at the close of the novel, with voices sounding “gratefully in St. John’s ear,” (353) the encounter with meaning clearly coincides with the collapse of verbalization and the reinstatement of the voice. The cry of the Other reclaims the word from paternal law, the alterity of sound enhancing and subverting signification, reimposing melody upon reason. *The Voyage Out* can therefore be seen as a critique and deconstruction of its own discursive practices, dramatising its own gradual discoveries of the instability of rhetoric, the hollowness of the colonial enterprise, and the resonance of the maternal voice within the paternal word.

NOTES

1. See *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* , by Jean Francois Lyotard. Lyotard talks about sound and music producing the “being-now-of-the-heard sound,”(179) suggesting that “repetition is a problem of time. And music is a problem of time. But also of sonorous matter.” (153) “...sound, matter itself, is analyzable into its parameters: amplitude, frequency period, duration, resonance. And as we are dealing with the vibratory movement of a gas (air), the nature of this movement and its propagation also imply a repetition, that of the oscillation of the mobile part...and ...the rigidity of the sounding apparatus.”(153) On the other hand, he argues that nuance and timbre are essentially unrepeatable.

2. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, uses the inside / outside opposition to support the idea of mimicry as an integral feature of postcolonial culture.

3. Lucio Ruotolo’s *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf’s Novels*, argues that Woolf embraces interruption and disjunction, and that Woolf’s fiction explores the tension between a desire for wholeness and an openness to dissolution and disruption: “Tolerance for interruption is all but synonymous in Woolf with the quality of comprehension itself.” See p.99.

4. Paul de Man’s deconstruction of rhetorical tropes in “The Epistemology of Metaphor” (*Aesthetic Ideology*) shows the inherent translatability and perpetual motion of

metaphorical figures. The essay also establishes the relationship between grammar and rhetoric, their reciprocity and potential for mutual sabotage (p.38).

5. Sound pervades and structures *Between the Acts* perhaps more than any other of Woolf's novels, not only in terms of the registration of natural or mechanised noise, and the representation of interrupted and disjointed voices, but on the level of language itself, where repetition, assonance, onomatopoeia, and free aural association foreground themselves in an unprecedentedly explicit way.

6. Connor traces the development of exosomatic technologies for the transmission of the human voice (the telephone, the gramophone, the phonograph), theorising their psychological effect, and their implications for language itself, in terms of the work of Derrida and Kristeva, amongst others.(p.47).

7. Derrida is suspicious about the effect of hearing one's own voice as a justification for speech's alleged preeminence over writing, but he stresses the importance of the "ear of the other" as a disruption of presence, affirming enigmatically in the essay "Otobiographies" (*The Ear of the Other: Texts and discussions with Jacques Derrida*) that it is "the ear of the other that signs." (36)

8. Spurr provides a very useful analysis and classification of colonial rhetoric, based on the following typical processes: "surveillance" (of landscapes, interiors, bodies); "appropriation"; "aestheticization"; "classification"; "debasement" (inspired by a horror of the Other); "negation" (the Other as absence); "affirmation" (of the colonizer's values); "idealization" (of the savage, as in the case, for example, of T.E. Lawrence); "insubstantialization" (seeing the non-western world in terms of disturbing or enchanting visions "as easily dissolved as they are conjured up." 155); "naturalization" (nature as a blank space in discourse, awaiting the colonizer's imprint); "eroticization" (representing the colonized world as the feminine).

9. Silverman provides a useful summary of a variety of theoretical and ideological positions regarding what she calls "the fantasy of the maternal voice." Her critique of Kristeva's theories of the semiotic argues that the idea of the chora aligns femininity with disempowerment and a disabling interiority. See p.72-74.

10. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ., p.280 - 287. See, particularly, "The Bounded Text", "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini", and "Place Names".

11. Kristeva's descriptions of the experience of "abjection" closely resemble Woolf's "moments of being," particularly as recalled in *A Sketch of the Past*. See Linda Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* .

12. Rosalato, Guy. "La voix: entre corps et langage," *Revue française de psychanalyse* 37, no.1, 1974, p.81, quoted in *The Acoustic Mirror* , p.84-85.

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Jacob's Room : the name of the dead and the 'very moment of history'

1. Absence, presence, syncopation

If the underlying structural dynamic of *The Voyage Out* is best summarized by the inside / outside figure, *Jacob's Room* resonates with a similarly pervasive effect of absence and presence, and a kind of irregular syncopation between the two.

Jacob himself is elusive, a lost object of desire, his absence insistently invoked by the enunciation of his name, by his presence in the minds of others, by the spaces he has occupied and the objects he has touched, by the sound of his voice, the echo of his footsteps, the creak of his empty chair. He epitomizes the paradox of an absent presence, or a present absence, and in this respect the novel's detective pursuit of his history interrogates the inscrutability of presence and the problems of its retrospective reconstruction. Even when we are privy to his thoughts, he remains an intermittency, strangely opaque, and perhaps most strikingly resistant to being 'known' at precisely those moments which promise the greatest intimacy. Conversely, he looms largest through the obliquities of memory (those of reader, character, narrator), in the times that he has used up, the spaces that he has vacated, the desires that he has activated and left unfulfilled.

Jacob's availability to the reader, then, as 'historical' subject, shares the wrong-footing otherness of the syncopated rhythm, with expected stresses excised in favour of the alternative prominence of 'off-beats' whose presence is normally hidden by the tyrannical conventions of the traditional time-signature. As with syncopation, whose 'perverse' and provocative silences and juxtapositions scandalise and tantalize the ear, we hear Jacob most poignantly and resonantly in his absence. He is also indissolubly linked with the invisible catastrophe towards

which history propels him, the trauma of coming war, which the text leaves largely unfronfented, but which lurks in those emphatic silences, in the text's radical erasures, and its violent spatial, temporal and narrative dislocations.

Jacob's father too is absent, though paternity itself lingers in his patronym, inheres in the institutions of church, college and state, and hovers in the enigmatic figure of Captain Barfoot. The women in Jacob's life, Clara, Florinda, Fanny and Sandra, also abruptly appear and disappear, while the presence-in-absence of his mother is inscribed in her pervasive correspondence, to the extent that one of her letters is a silent but sentient witness to Jacob's sexual encounter with Florinda.

The intermittent voices of the characters are also joined periodically by a peculiarly displaced narrative voice, emerging now and then into earshot, from diegetic anonymity, to pronounce, elegize and interrogate, before withdrawing, once again, into inaudibility. One of the effects of all these intermittences, these syncopations of voice, presence, incident, location, human and inhuman noise, is that the novel can be experienced as a kind of uneven oscillation between heard sound and its remission. The text foregrounds the discontinuity and impermanence of the reading experience itself, its fluctuation between sublime but perilous ubiety, and anxious, abject dissolution, between remembering and forgetting, presence and absence, being and nothingness.

2. The voice of war

The other great absent presence in the novel is that of the war, which lurks in the interstices of the text and haunts its margins, either as an ominous, gathering silence, or else insinuating itself into the text's acoustic textures. Recorded noise becomes, so to speak, multitimbral, resonating with the presence of future

catastrophe, as well as the abject or sublime superfluity of the synchronous moment .

Virginia Woolf's diaries suggest that, from the home front, the Great War must have been a strangely invisible conflict, something peculiarly and elusively elsewhere, but rendered menacingly imminent and radically omnipresent by the new threat from the air, a threat speaking primarily to the ear. Although there were air attacks, there was nothing like the visible and palpable devastation of the Blitz or the frequent bombing raids on provincial towns and cities during the second World War. Audio-visual News media were in their infancy and many reports from theatres of operations were censored or cursory. If anything, Woolf's diaries suggest that it must have been a time of visual depletion, of shortages, disappearances and eerie absences, dimmed lights and dispersions, of human and material deficit, a stealthy, imperceptible haemorrhage of the visual economy. At the same time, it was a war that reached peoples' imaginations most vividly through their ears, through word of mouth, through martial music and marching bands, and, for some, through the terror of the air raid, the wail of sirens and the boom and crackle of anti-aircraft guns.

Conversely, for those returning from the cacophany and claustrophobia of the trenches, England must have seemed spacious, colourful, and eerily quiet.

Although, as Martin Jay points out, it is 'hazardous' to generalize about the 'effects on visual experience and the discursive reflection on that experience stimulated by the First World War',¹ it seems reasonable to suggest that the trench warfare of the western front was characterized by new levels of visual disorientation and impoverishment, as well as by unprecedented dissonances and intensities of noise. The trenches themselves assured the invisibility of the enemy, confining the soldier's view to the mud below and the sky above for much of the time, while

smoke, gas, and flares further contributed to the depletion and convulsion of the visual field. The 'invention of camouflage and the disappearance of differences in uniform between men and officers', ² along with the ever-present, monochromatic mud, complete a picture of ocular deprivation and disorientation, which, in turn, 'put a premium upon auditory signals and seemed to make the war experience peculiarly subjective and intangible'. ³

This dissolution of the visual field into phantasmagoria, and the corresponding pre-eminence of the aural is clearly registered in many of the poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, inscribed in the pervasiveness of the exclamatory, disembodied voice, and a whole catalogue of onomatopoeic and phonemic effects. *A Working Party* by Sassoon, for example, documents a soldier's reliance on touch and hearing, the 'gloom' having 'swallowed his sense of sight', while the glimpses of flickering cigarettes, braziers, candles, and the momentary 'shining whiteness' of flares are premonitions of his final extinction, figured as the snuffing out of visual perception. Similarly, in *The Sentry*, Wilfred Owen describes the blinding of a soldier by a 'whizz-bang', and the ineradicable memory of his sightless 'eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids', a concatenation of the acoustic and the visual which graphically dramatises the battlefield's reorientation of the sensory hierarchy, and the assault on the assumptions of a fundamentally ocularcentrist sensory regime by the violent alterity of mechanical and explosive noise.

Balanced against this earth-bound spatial disintegration and degradation of visual perception was the novel aerial perspective of the flyer, which allowed the discernment of visible pattern in the chaotic networks of trenches and dugouts. The fragmented, individuated and incomplete perspectives of the terrestrial war were thus offset by a new, extra-terrestrial viewpoint, seeming to confirm the detached abstractions of cartographers and strategists. Gillian Beer has suggested that this

new aerial perspective fundamentally shifted notions of national identity, re-ordering the 'axes of experience',⁴ dissolving borders between states, and reconfiguring conceptions of space. Certainly the flyer appears to have been quickly mythologised during the war, as the 'knight of the sky', driven by a 'lonely impulse of delight', and heroically 'embodying the ancient myth of Icarian freedom'.⁵ According to Martin Jay and Eric Leed, however, the sanitising, celestial perspective of the aviator could not compensate for the 'actual impoverishment' of normal visual experience on the ground, which itself led to 'the practical collapse of that transcendental notion of a shared perspective already theoretically undermined by Nietzsche'. Thus Gertrude Stein's appellation, the 'cubist war', is suggestive both of the linear and rectangular appearance of the land viewed from the sky, and also of the terrestrial fragmentation of a 'unified scopic regime'⁶ into multiple, relative, and subjective perspectives, a process which is mirrored in the structural and compositional strategies of Virginia Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room*, with its montage of incidents and intermittent, fragmentary voices.

Virginia Woolf's diary during the war years (on either side of her illness in 1915) is full of nervous energy and details of her social activity, which in many places suggests a self-conscious and strained normality. In a number of entries, however, there is a clear reference to the sensitization of the ear and the deprivation of the eye suggested above. In the entry for Sunday 3rd of January, 1915, for example, Woolf records that she and Leonard attended a concert at the Queen's Hall, an experience that inspires an extraordinarily angry outburst:

'Considering that my ears have been pure of music for some weeks, I think patriotism is a base emotion. By this I mean that they played a National Anthem and a hymn, and all I could feel was the entire absence of emotion in myself and everyone else. If the British spoke openly about WCs, and copulation, then they might be stirred by universal emotions...' ⁷

'Pure of music' is a striking phrase, suggesting a kind of aural decontamination, a purification of the sense by abstinence, which, Woolf clearly implies, authenticates the lack of emotional response she detects in herself and the rest of the audience. The precise insensitivity of 'copulation' economically records her contempt for the emotional insularity and repression of the English middle classes in public situations, but there is also an element of frustration that no genuine collective feeling is enjoined, that the war won't make itself real, even at the level of 'base emotion'. For the lucky majority of the population, the air-raids, when they came, must still have remained strangely out of reach, tantalizingly and menacingly elsewhere.

This sense of her ear as a newly honed instrument for the detection of hypocrisy, listening strenuously for the war to 'speak', is complemented by an awareness of London as a newly darkened and chromatically denuded environment, 'the most dismal of places', with 'all its electric globes half muffled in blue paint'. The streets are 'mud-coloured', as if mimicking distant battlefields, while electric light and daylight seem precisely calibrated to cancel each other out, and reduce the sky to a 'cold and flat' two-dimensionality. Intervening between these accounts, of disrupted, destabilized sensory dynamics, comes a suggestion of the lurid, hallucinated glare of the 'tube', an undimmed, subterranean world in comparison to the colourless and darkened surface, in whose artificial brilliance the faces of other people lour like 'raw red beef and silver herrings'.

Several other of the January entries begin by recording sudden, intrusive or disruptive noises. On Monday 11th January, Woolf is disturbed while lying in bed by her servant, Lizzy, 'crying in a strange, unnatural voice "Fire! Fire!"' Three days later she and Leonard are woken by 'a thumping, throbbing sound as if a motor omnibus were on the roof, endeavouring to start...', this time the result of Lizzy's

failure to fill the pipes with water. In both cases, the acoustic detail of the descriptions, their carefully expressed otherness, as well as the space and effort given over to them, suggests that aurality is increasingly preoccupying Woolf. Even something as mundane as the arrival of a guest, Walter Lamb, on the morning of 10th of January is prefaced by his 'tap at the door'. In an entry for 1st February, Woolf explicitly links this aural hypersensitivity with the war. She is in St. James Street when there is 'a terrific explosion':

'...people came running out of Clubs; stopped still and gazed about them. But there was no Zeppelin or aeroplane - only, I suppose, a very large tyre burst. But it is really an instinct with me, and most people, I suppose, to turn any sudden noise, or dark object in the sky, into an explosion, or a German aeroplane. And it always seems utterly impossible that one should be hurt.'

This passage strongly suggests an elusive, phantom quality to the war, as if evidence of its prosecution is being listened out for and looked for, keenly anticipated and imagined. Were genuine explosions very common or immediate, people would be less vulnerable to false alarms, less anxious to confirm its existence. This is a war (in 1915, at any rate) that is struggling, on the home front, to register as material reality, where most alarm is, in a sense, 'false' alarm. That Woolf is not alone in her aural sensitization is suggested by an entry for Saturday 13th February, again recording a visit to the Queen's Hall:

'I daresay the playing wasn't very good, but the stream of melody was divine. It struck me what an odd thing it was - this little box of pure beauty set down in the middle of London streets, and people - all looking so ordinary, crowding to hear, as if they weren't ordinary at all, or had an ambition for something better.'

It is as if music is defamiliarised and renewed by an aural context of brutal concussions and detonations, real and imagined, as though people are transfigured and newly dignified by their receptivity to melodies and harmonies.

which are themselves revitalized in opposition to a barbaric cacophany, no less audible for being unbearably silent and remote. It is as though a population is listening as never before.

By the time Woolf resumes her diary in 1917, following her illness, she is working at the precise registration of sound effects in an even more explicit way. Saxon Sydney-Turner's voice is described as 'gentle and giving off a sound as of a boiling, but not over-boiling, kettle; speechless of course' (25th October, 1917). Reflecting on recent time spent apart from Leonard, she characterises her isolation in terms of music and the physical reverberation of sound, to the extent that identity, and being itself, are associated with vibration:

'One's personality seems to echo out across space, when he's not there to enclose all one's vibrations. This is not very intelligibly written; but the feeling itself is a strange one - as if marriage were a completing of the instrument, and the sound of one alone penetrates as if it were a violin robbed of its orchestra or piano.' (Friday, 2nd November, 1917)

This chimes with ideas in *A Sketch of the Past*, where key memories, 'moments of being', are described in terms of violent, sudden concussions and delicate membranes, and infantile spatialization is linked as much to aurality as it is to vision, the two combining in a form of synaesthesia. These earliest impressions, of colour, light and sound, also conform to Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora*,⁸ the enclosure surrounding mother and infant, whose dimensions are partly described by the sound of the maternal voice. The diary entry closely links self and voice, and suggests the lost boundaries of the *chora*, its absent reciprocation, so that the lone voice echoes into empty space, deprived of the accompaniment and resonance of the sonorous envelope of the choric enclosure. The fate of emitted sound, the sense of its material vibration, irrecoverable dispersion, and loss into the void, becomes a key preoccupation and a favoured descriptive formula, not

only in *Jacob's Room*, but in the other novels and several of the short stories (*In the Orchard*,⁹ for example).

It would seem that Woolf's experience of the war, then, helped to refine her sense of the alterity of sound, the way it can epitomise all that is fugitive, the referential reality of the irretrievable historical moment, as well as its unmediated connection to the first things of subjectivity. That she is conscious of this aural sensitization is supported by a diary entry of 6th September, which records a nearby air raid and notes that 'having trained one's ears to listen one can't get them not to...' (Thursday 6th December, 1917). A disrupted night, listening to 'guns apparently at Kew', makes Woolf alert and newly receptive to ordinary morning sounds, of carts 'rolling out of stables, motor cars throbbing, and the prolonged ghostly whistlings' recalling people to the 'munitions factory'. The strangeness of the night is succeeded by a 'perfectly still and fine winter's day', as though the war were confined to the hours of darkness and dreaming, and the vivid ephemerality of heard sound, leaving no visible trace on the day.

The impoverishment of the visual and the enhancement of the aural is most intensely encapsulated in the peculiarly modern event of the night air raid itself, a study in invisibility and the terror of noise. The blindness of the earth-bound victims, cocooned in shelters or darkened houses, contrasts starkly with the visual mastery of the aerial perspective, real for the pilot, imagined for the targets. This blindness is prefaced by the otherness of wailing sirens, which announce not only invisible and imminent peril, but a sudden ontological destabilization, colouring what was safe with danger, and what was familiar with menace, unveiling the indifferent quiddity of the object. In this sense, the air raid can be imagined as a kind of assault on interiority, dissolving boundaries between subject and object, inside and outside. The interior of the home, the controlled and carefully

demarcated spaces and objects of parlour and bedroom, of village square or city street, become vulnerable to the boundless outside of the skies, while human subjects become bodies in peril, helpless targets, devoid of individuality, awaiting random judgement from above and violation of containing skin and flesh. The secured spaces of social, domestic and inner life are laid open in the darkness and emptied of meaning. Death penetrates the ear, detected in the changing pitch of an engine, the peculiar timbre of a wailing, whistling bomb. And yet, for most people, the new day would reveal an apparently unchanged world, so that Woolf is able to observe that 'it always seems utterly impossible that one should be hurt' (Monday 1st February, 1915).

The terror of the air raid, then, lies partly in its imminence and immanence, its enunciation of the present moment, which is stretched and dramatised in the instantaneity and pervasiveness of the heard sound. *Jacob's Room* can be read as a similarly prolonged moment of anticipation, oscillating between presence and absence, with everything pointing to Jacob's final disappearance. The novel ends with the 'dull sound' of guns, heard and interpreted by Betty Flanders as 'the sea' and then as 'nocturnal women ... beating great carpets' (JR 154), both images of maternal power, as if the otherness of the noise of the guns recalls the otherness of first sounds, re-activating a forgotten abjection and archaic memories of the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice.

The final visit to Jacob's room records his visible, bodily absence, inscribed in the continuing presence of his belongings, particularly his old shoes and his arm-chair, which bear the traces of his body. This sense of lives suddenly abandoned, the removal of the human, the corporeal, the carnal, from the visible world, leaving behind empty, bereaved spaces and orphaned objects, is surely fundamental to the collective experience of the war. It also taps into originary traumatic losses, of

the mother's body and voice, lost objects fundamental to the formation of the human subject and the beginnings of desire.

The visual loss of Jacob's body from his room is also a heard absence, and this heard absence is also a kind of presence. Woolf exactly repeats an earlier description of Jacob's empty room, a duplication which dissolves the clear distinction between absence and presence, contemporaneity and futurity, so that this final, irrevocable absence was always latent in the earlier one, and Jacob's presence, in both cases, outlasts his bodily disappearance:

'Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the whicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there' (JR 31, 155).

The minute sounds of the shifting flowers, the swelling curtain, the creaking fibre, somehow speak both of absence and presence in a way that can be related to the lost objects of infancy, the mother's breast, gaze and voice. Infantile separation from the body and voice of the mother has the power of a final separation, so that anxiety about her absence informs all subsequent experience of her presence.

Similarly, in Kristevan terms, the semiotic regime of the *chora* becomes internalized as semiotic disposition, so that the mother is present, even in her absence. In the repeated formula from *Jacob's Room*, therefore, Woolf manages to evoke this same paradoxical fusion of absence and presence, the one always latent in the other. Future absence is latent in present presence, and the trace of that presence persists in the absence which has, or will, come. The description also recalls one of Woolf's own earliest memories, recorded in *A Sketch of the Past*, of lying in the nursery at St. Ives, hearing the waves breaking and 'the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out'.¹⁰ This time, the remembered sounds preserve the plenitude and bliss of the maternal voice,

speaking through the rhythmical breaking of the waves.

There is something else speaking in the final episode of *Jacob's Room*, though. In the creaking chair, the throbbing of the engines from the street and a 'harsh unhappy voice' crying 'something unintelligible', in Bonamy crying aloud Jacob's name, Woolf is also evoking the remote voice of the war, a kind of ventriloquial or distorted telephonic trace of a catastrophe that is largely invisible and almost out of earshot, but which speaks in the assumed tones of apparently unrelated sonic events. The war is elusive and invisible, strangely absent, but can be heard in unexpected places, and detected in the very act of listening. The sense that Woolf's experience of the war is significantly an aural experience, evidenced in her diaries, is further registered in the privileging of the ear in *Jacob's Room*, the way it listens to history and to itself, and the way in which it invites us to listen.

3. The name of the dead

One of the most insistent acoustic motifs of *Jacob's Room* is the calling out of names, and particularly the name of Jacob himself. The novel begins and ends with this name being cried aloud, with Jacob being invoked, summoned, conjured up, in his absence, by the voice of another. The name itself is precisely judged. The Old Testament associations of 'Jacob' clearly evoke patriarchy, male lineage, the name of the father, while the surname, Flanders, inscribes the coming war in the most fundamental signifier of his identity. The ghostly voice of the war is written into his name.

The reiteration of any proper name enacts a strange sort of designification, or a progressive disclosure of the otherness hidden within it. The name of a person is a marker of identity, but it is also a pre-existing signifier which has 'belonged' to

others, and is bestowed upon the infant, allowing its bearer to be invoked in absence, before birth and after death. Thus it both precedes and survives the subject, and this anterior and posterior persistence of the name helps to shape Woolf's novel. The enigmatic quality associated with Jacob's character is partly a function of the aporetic effect released by the repetition of his name, so often uttered in his absence, which resonates throughout the novel, and is sounded before his personal or bodily entry into the story, as well as after his departure.

The name survives the subject, then, and can inherit not only material property, but, as it were, other subjects, which is why, according to Derrida's reading of Nietzsche, the name is 'always and a priori a dead man's name, a name of death':¹¹

'You will not be able to hear and understand my name unless you hear it with an ear attuned to the name of the dead man and the living feminine - the double and divided name of the father who is dead and the mother who is living on, who will moreover outlive me long enough to bury me. The mother is living on, and this living on is the name of the mother. This survival is my life whose shores she overflows. And my father's name, in other words, my patronym? That is the name of my death, of my dead life.'¹²

The patronym, in that it precedes and exceeds the bearer, in that it is also the name of the dead father and will survive the son who will die, is inescapably linked to the death of the subject. If the death of the subject is written in his patronym, then Jacob Flanders is doubly the name of death, the name of the dead father and the name of the dead soldier. But, according to Derrida, the proper name also contains the 'living feminine', the name of the mother, which will outlive the subject. Jacob's mother literally outlives her son, surviving to dispose of his 'old shoes' and 'overflowing' the 'shores' of his life, but her presence within his name itself is also suggested at the end of the novel. When Bonamy calls out Jacob's name he is answered by Jacob's mother, Betty Flanders, 'bursting open the bedroom door'

and exclaiming, "Such confusion everywhere!" (JR 155), thus completing a pattern that corresponds with uncanny precision to Derrida's formulation.

'Place Names', Julia Kristeva's meditation on childhood and infantile language, closes with some equally interesting reflections on the semantics of proper names. For Kristeva, the proper name, in the archaic linguistic economy of childhood, is a 'substantive of definite reference (therefore similar to the demonstrative) but of indefinite signification ("cognitive" as well as "emotive"), arising from an uncertain position of the speaking subject's identity and referring back to the pre-objectival state of naming'.¹³ Proper names, therefore, relate back to very early spatial naming, to the use of deictics or 'anaphoric demonstratives', and have their roots in the 'first vocalizations and echolalias concomitant to the constitution of the semiotic *chora*'.¹⁴

'The emergence of personal designation and proper name in close relation to the shifters and semantic latencies (of the "potential space") of this period underpin (and in that sense explain) the dynamic and semantic ambiguity of proper names, their lack of precision as to the notion of identity, and their impact within unconscious and imaginary constructs'.¹⁵

The 'dynamic and semantic ambiguity' of proper names is thus related to potential meanings latent in the semiotic *chora* which, in turn, is partly constituted as the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice. Because, according to Kristeva, the *chora* survives within the adult subject (or the subject-in-language) as semiotic disposition, it could be argued that proper names, enunciated, spoken, have the capacity to activate, within subjects who have entered the symbolic code, latencies and semantic potentialities associated with the originary sonority of the maternal voice.

Woolf's foregrounding of Jacob's name, therefore, can be seen to release a range

of associations, notably the inevitable presence of death within the patronym, but also resonances to do with the maternal voice and the timeless space of the semiotic *chora*. These possibilities and latencies within proper names, their capacity to activate abject or sublime associations, perhaps go some way to explaining the unsettling effect of the repetition of Jacob's name at the beginning of the novel. Archer, on the instructions of his mother, is calling for Jacob, and shouts his name twice, on three separate occasions. Kristeva's formula for the proper name, of 'definite reference' and 'indefinite signification', is tested by this reiteration. Our assumptions about the referential function of the name, the idea that Archer is simply attempting to attract Jacob's attention, become less straightforward with each repetition. There is something faintly mocking in the repeated vocalization of a name, while there is also a sense (linked to our awareness of the book's title) of a complete, and other, life being evoked. The signifier is defamiliarized by its over-exposure, becoming what Frederic Jameson calls a 'signifier in isolation', charged with a mysterious and heightened affect, and causing a curious 'loss of reality'.¹⁶ Indeterminacy at the level of signification, as it were, infects the deictic, referential function, so that it is increasingly uncertain who or what this 'Ja-cob!' is.

Woolf stresses the enunciation of the name, the fact that it is an utterance, separating the phonemes with a dash and surrounding the words with blank space on the page. Significantly, Jacob is thus first evoked as an absence, as one who is, in a sense, already dead and gone. We share the act of listening with Charles Steele, busy painting Jacob's mother as she sits writing letters on the beach, and he articulates the nuance and timbre of the utterance:

'The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks - so it sounded' (JR 4).

This recalls Woolf's diary description of her 'personality' echoing 'out across space' and the 'penetrating sound' of 'one alone', during an absence of Leonard's. Again there is the sense of loss and separation, the missing mediation, absorption and facilitation of the cry by the mother's body and answering voice. Symbolically, the voice breaks against the referent, against the 'rock' of paternal law. The diegetic voice, in the succeeding pages, picks up on Archer's enunciation, repeating Jacob's name with an insistence that goes well beyond mere grammatical or narrative necessity, foregoing its substitution by pronoun in a way that is reminiscent of the writing of a child. This incantation of Jacob's name, along with his lack of identity, combines to promote the oscillation between absence and presence mentioned earlier.

On almost the first occasion that Jacob himself speaks, he also repeats a name. His experiences on the beach, leading up to this utterance, consist of a succession of encounters with various manifestations of otherness. To start with he climbs a 'black' rock, which emerges from the sand 'like something primitive', on top of which he finds a 'huge crab'. Preoccupied with his discovery, he stumbles over 'an enormous man and woman', with 'very red' faces, stretched motionless and 'entirely rigid', side by side within a few feet of the sea. The faces stare up at Jacob and Jacob stares down at them. Alarmed by this, he runs towards what he thinks is a 'large black woman' sitting on the sand, sobbing the words 'Nanny! Nanny!', but this woman turns out to be another black rock, covered with 'the seaweed which pops when it is pressed'. Composing himself, he then discovers a 'whole skull', with 'the teeth in it', before finally being reunited with his mother.

In quick succession, therefore, Jacob is confronted with the uncompromising and indifferent quiddity of the object (a rock), the alien tactility of the Other (a crab), the prone bodies of a man and woman, frozen in corpse-like or post-coital immobility, a

mother substitute transformed into another rock, and the physical evidence of death, the skull beneath the skin. Pretty well the entire trajectory of a life is thus miniaturised in this brief episode.

Jacob's relationship with Clara also begins and ends with acts of naming, or at least with the voicing of names. He meets her while staying at the Durrants' and comes to know her name as she is laughingly scolded by Mrs Durrant and Timothy for some unidentified, but presumably 'outrageous', remark:

"Oh, Clara, Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Durrant, and Timothy Durrant adding, "Clara, Clara," Jacob named the shape in yellow gauze Timothy's sister, Clara' (JR 47).

The name is repeated five times, in a descending intonational curve, from indefinite, exclamatory invocation, through Timothy's flatter, sarcastic or weary tones, to the tonal closure and finality of Jacob's relatively definite appellation. Jacob takes a kind of discursive possession of Clara, through the act of naming the 'shape in yellow gauze', and through receiving the name, in relay, from the Durrants. From unknown semantic potentiality, 'Clara' is, as it were, confined by this process to a limited and manageable signification. She is assigned a shape, a colour, a texture, and the status of a possession, 'Timothy's sister', becoming a name that belongs to another name.

But Jacob's presence is only ever partial, temporary, provisional, and his departure from the Durrants' home is accomplished in another extraordinary flurry of names and echoing utterances:

"Good-bye," said Jacob. "Good-bye," he repeated. "Good-bye," he said once more. Charlotte Wilding flung open the bedroom window and cried out: "Good-bye, Mr. Jacob!"
"Mr. Flanders!" cried Mr. Clutterbuck, trying to extricate himself from his

beehive chair. "Jacob Flanders!"

"Too late, Joseph," said Mrs. Durrant' (JR 52).

Once again the otherness, or indefinite signification, of proper names is evoked, this time not merely through reiteration, but through the varied combinations of christian name and surname and the complicating factor of the formal title. There could scarcely be a more emphatic or ominous valediction than this. Mr. Clutterbuck's inexplicable enunciation of Jacob's full name is particularly doom-laden, evoking as it does the great symbolic moments of a person's identification, birth (or naming), marriage, and death. But the sequence also consists of an excess of naming, an over-naming, which, instead of evoking the presence of the subject, rather announces the persistence and alterity of the name only, in whose shadow the subject dissolves. Jacob, Mr. Jacob, Mr. Flanders, Jacob Flanders. By the time the sequence ends, the subject has gone and the signifier stands in aporetic isolation.

'What does one understand under the name of name?', asks Derrida in the preface to a collection of three essays, published under the title *On the Name* :

'And what occurs when one gives a name? What does one give then?.... What happens above all, when it is necessary to sur-name [*surnommer*], renaming there where, precisely, the name comes to be found lacking? What makes the proper name into a sort of sur-name, pseudonym, or cryptonym at once singular and singularly untranslatable?' 17

Derrida's answer to his own question is 'an absolute secret, at once essential and foreign to what one in general calls by the noun / name secret' (xiv). And this secret leads us back again to the *chora* , or *khora* , as Derrida calls it in the third of his essays. In this essay, Derrida returns to Plato's *Timaeus* and addresses *khora* (he omits the definite article) as a kind of aporetic or impossible epistemological or rhetorical phenomenon, a necessary and inevitable other, rather than part of a

retroactive psychoanalytical model, as the name of that place which can't be named, writing about the status of such a word. The *khora* is neither 'this nor that' and 'both this and that' (91), neither 'sensible nor intelligible' (96). It is not even an oscillation between two poles, but an oscillation between 'two types of oscillation', the double participation and the double exclusion (neither this nor that, and both this and that). Some of this inherent untranslatability in the name *khora* attaches itself to all proper names, which like the *khora*, participate in 'the intelligible in a very troublesome and indeed aporetic way' (90). And so it is with the name of Jacob in *Jacob's Room*; Jacob Flanders, christened by the war, bearing the name of the dead father, in which can be heard the voice of the living mother, and the trace of the mother of all names, a name which is not a name, the *chora / khora*.

4. The 'conspiracy of hush'

The first chapter of *Jacob's Room* ends with a paradigm of the maternal voice in action, soothing the child as the storm rages outside, and whispering over the baby in the cot. The strangeness and menace of the storm, its animation and immediacy, are evoked primarily through acoustic details. A leaf taps 'hurriedly, persistently upon the glass', while the lodging house is full of 'gurgling and rushing' sounds, the noise of water, 'bubbling and squeaking and running along the pipes and streaming down the windows' (JR 7). Betty Flanders' voice works to mediate the otherness of these sounds, constructing a narrative space into which the child, Archer, can safely retreat:

'Mrs. Flanders stooped over him. 'Think of the fairies,' said Betty Flanders. 'Think of the lovely, lovely birds settling down on their nests. Now shut your eyes and see the old mother bird with a worm in her beak. Now turn and shut your eyes,' she murmured, 'and shut your eyes.'" (JR 7)

These simple and direct injunctions manifestly relate to more elaborate, shared

and rehearsed narratives, triggering coping strategies programmed into the child by the mother. This function of the maternal voice, narrating bedtime stories and nursery rhymes, and facilitating the child's movement from consciousness to unconsciousness, could be said to operate simultaneously within both the semiotic and symbolic regimes. The phonemic continuity and rhythm of the utterance, the pulsional and material qualities of the voice itself, constitute an invitation to withdraw from consciousness back into the sonorous envelope of the maternal enclosure, which itself now occupies a double space, that described by the mother's voice and that of the semiotic disposition internalised within the child. At the same time, the alterity of the sounds which menace the child is negotiated within the economy of the symbolic code, so that the threat of the Other to the identity of the infant is deflected by the new-found power of naming, the ability to repulse the real by invoking the symbolic. The mother's voice exploits the symbolic code to re-admit the child into the semiotic regime of the *chora*, which offers him a refuge from his fear.

The main theoretical positions regarding the relationship between language and infantile or childhood fears are explored in *First Things* by Mary Jacobus. The horse phobia of 'little Hans', originally a Freudian case-study, is thus variously interpreted as the 'fear of his father, or castrating progenitor' (Freud), the 'fear of the castration signified by his mother' (Lacan), and the fear of the 'unnameable - the lost maternal object which predates the onset of both language and oedipality', and which consists of 'an impossible unity posited (and mourned for) at the imaginary origin of the not-yet-subject' (Kristeva).¹⁸ According to this last model, language provides the child with a refuge, 'standing as it does between him and the nothingness he fears'. Transposing this to Woolf's novel, we see Betty Flanders interposing language, or the skeletal framework of a narrative, between her son Archer and his fears, and prompting him, out of these linguistic ingredients, to

initiate his own defensive wordplay, proffering 'language instead of the good breast' ¹⁹ as the means to sublimate his abjection.

Having silenced the voice of the child, Archer, Betty Flanders turns her attention to her baby, who has already been fed and put to sleep by the nurse, or nanny, Rebecca (another precisely named character). Between them, the two women plot what Woolf describes as the 'eternal conspiracy of hush and clean bottles' (JR 8). This is a puzzling formulation, juxtaposing the onomatopoeic 'hush', a word routinely associated with the mother's voice and the facilitation or absorption of the infant's cry, and the Latinate 'conspiracy', implying political intrigue and the subversion, from within, of existing systems and structures of power. In its conflation of the paternal and political with the maternal and infantile, therefore, the phrase embraces both the symbolic and the semiotic, invoking their incompatibility and the tension between them. Furthermore, 'conspiracy' derives from *spirare*, roughly translating as 'breathing together', carrying strong associations of whispering or inaudible utterance, so that 'conspiracy of hush' rustles with the presence of muted, competing voices.

But who is this conspiracy between and who is it against? Which voices compete within this trope? The aim of the conspiracy would appear to be the continued silence of the infant, its safe containment within the enclosure of the maternal presence and voice, apparently making mothers into the conspirators, plotting to secure the space of the *chora* against the intrusions of the object world and paternal word. In creating the hushed space of the nursery, however, in banishing the word, the mother also silences herself, so that she is enclosed within the protective wall, or '*enceinte*' ²⁰ of her own *choric* 'conspiracy', on the outside of the symbolic code, and therefore divested of discursive power or influence.

In 'political' terms, then, the hush of the nursery represents a stalemate between semiotic and symbolic regimes, erecting an *enceinte*, so to speak, made up of pregnant silence, which guarantees a form of *entente* between maternal voice and paternal word. The infant is safely cocooned on the inside of the semiotic enclosure and his entry into the symbolic code is postponed, but only at the cost of the mother's similar confinement on the inside of her own conspiracy of silence. From this inside, however, the 'communital meaning' she has lost appears 'worthless' or 'absurd' anyway,²¹ so she has forfeited nothing. A 'conspiracy of hush', therefore, accurately summarizes the deadlocked political dynamics of the pre-oedipal, nocturnal nursery.

The phrase also prefigures the silence which will attach itself to Jacob throughout the novel, as he himself becomes a lost object of desire and maternal hush becomes historical trauma. Betty Flanders' closing words, as she holds out a pair of Jacob's old shoes, 'What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?', are terrible, not only because they speak of her unspeakable loss, but because they speak of her silence, of love undeclared, protests unmade, objections unspoken. When the war finally and momentarily makes itself heard, in the dull sound of distant guns, she imagines 'nocturnal women', beating 'great carpets', voiceless women trapped in an 'eternal conspiracy of hush'. The paradoxical absence and presence of the war, its remote voice, its resonant silence, finds its acoustic equivalent in the voiceless mother and the 'eternal conspiracy of hush'.

5. 'Talking, talking, talking...'

The hush of the nursery, a verbal absence, is succeeded by the sonorous rituals and discursive superabundance of the Cambridge college, by an embarrassment of words, by 'talking, talking, talking - as if everything could be talked' (JR 32).

Woolf's collage of life at King's College consists largely of a sequence of interiors or enclosed spaces, the Chapel, the Quad, the house of a don, and the rooms of the professors, fellows and undergraduates. Each space is occupied by voices and sounds and silences, and each is visited by a curiously spectral narrative voice, which, so to speak, tunes itself in and out of range of the reader's ear, moving imperceptibly between audibility and inaudibility, sometimes detectable sometimes not, as if operating on an intermittent frequency.

At the start of the Cambridge sequence, this voice tunes itself in to an audible frequency with a casual, almost conspiratorial conversational gambit. 'They say the sky is the same everywhere', introducing itself in the manner of a stranger whose small talk at first seems suitably trivial and only retrospectively intense, with the third person pronoun imposing an automatic intimacy. With our attention and co-operation thus guaranteed, as it were, by the normal rules of polite social intercourse, the voice becomes more insistent, emphatically directing our gaze and alerting our ears to the sights and sounds of the College Chapel:

'Look, as they pass into service, how airily the gowns blow out, as though nothing dense and corporeal were within. What sculpted faces, what certainty, authority controlled by piety, although great boots march under the gowns. In what orderly procession they advance.' (JR 24)

This is a voice with whom we cannot quite be comfortable, about which we cannot quite be certain, and which we cannot quite locate. The reiterated exclamatory construction smacks of insincerity, but the observations seem genuinely portentous and particular, simultaneously disclosing a brutal militarism and an unsettling bodilessness beneath the aetherial academic gowns. This is not simply narrative irony or authorial satire, though, but a much more profoundly displaced species of utterance, a voice speaking both from out of thin air and from within the spaces constructed by the text, a voice that seems to speak from an equivalent of the

impossible or virtual space of the radio broadcast. Like radio voices, which cannot but betray the calculated circumstances of their enunciations and the technological fact of their transmission, it is both intimate and remote, familiar and anonymous, rehearsed and spontaneous, earnest and insincere. It is even knowing about the effects of the sounds that it reports, so that when it tells us that 'gravely sounded the voices' and 'wisely the organ replied', we are both implicated in the acoustic event and alienated from it by the ironic word order and the oddly childish adjectives.

In the middle of this unsettling depiction of the college chapel, the voice suddenly switches to a completely different imaginary space, as if slipping from one frequency or channel to another, disorientating the listening reader with the apparent incongruity of the new narrative fragment:

'...If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it - a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose - something senseless inspires them....Ah, but what's that? A terrifying volley of pistol shots rings out - cracks sharply; ripples spread - silence laps smooth over sound. A tree - a tree has fallen, a sort of death in the forest. After that, the wind in the trees sounds melancholy' (JR 25).

This narrative discontinuity, therefore, resolves into both allegory and phonemic enactment. The splitting sound of the tree becomes the crackle of rifle fire, and, along with the 'curious assembly' of insects, confirms the incipient militarism of the chapel service, already implied by the 'great boots' marching 'under the gowns'. The war is waiting, dormant, in the chapel, its imperatives latent in the hierarchical structures of religious and academic institutions. At the same time, the voice actually produces the sonic event of the 'pistol-shots' (or falling tree), onomatopoeic concussion being succeeded by throbbing, mellifluous reverberation. This allegorical moment is atemporal, synchronous only perhaps with Jacob's death (but persisting outside of any biographical or chronological

time), so that spatial dislocation is matched by an equivalent temporal dislocation. Nor, once again, is this the voice of the author, speaking with hindsight. Instead, it represents a kind of aural witnessing of a referential reality which cannot be appropriated and subsumed as 'History', since Jacob possesses no 'historical', biographical or corporeal specificity, and is, anyway still 'alive' at this moment of his death. It is not history, then, but it does create and re-create a moment of unmediated 'historical' truth, forever beyond the reach of partial ideological or rhetorical inflection and forensic, chronological or statistical laws of evidence.

There are other such moments in chapter III of *Jacob's Room*, private moments in silent or empty rooms, rooms full of people and timeless, continuous talking, and the noises of collective college life, with the space of the court 'humming, suddenly vocal' (JR 34) with piano music, a shouted name ('Jo-seph! Jo-seph!'), the stroke of the clock, and footsteps echoing in the stone Quad. Sometimes the sound of voices is given a physical, material dimension, so that spoken words become 'thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds like silver, like moonlight' (JR 32), and Sopwith's voice is heard 'twining stiff fibres of awkward speech - things young men blurted out - plaiting them round his own smooth garland...' (JR 33). The 'hum of talk' from the Dining Hall is accompanied by the clatter of plates, and the 'soft thud' of doors opening and shutting. The reading process becomes a form of expectant witnessing, an intensified type of listening to an acoustic testimony of all that is about to be lost, all the impervious and transient lives, to the 'laughter' dying 'in the air' (JR 35). And during this sound-portrait of college life, we become aware that the strange radiophonic voice which introduced us to the chapel has departed again, or tuned back onto an unobtainable frequency, producing an oblique and remote sense of loss. The chapter ends with a kind of hollow and doomed vitality, with Jacob as a looming but indistinct figure, but also with a premonition of traumatic, historical loss, loss which is performed in the ephemerality of the heard

sound:

‘But Jacob moved. He murmured good-night. He went out into the court. He buttoned his jacket across his chest. He went back to his rooms, and being the only man who walked at that moment back to his rooms, his footsteps rang out, his figure loomed large. Back from the Chapel, back from the Hall, back from the Library, came the sound of his footsteps, as if the old stone echoed with magisterial authority: ‘The young man - the young man - the young man - back to his rooms.’” (JR 37).

The passage begins with the stilted precision, detail and banality of legal testimony, but then moves into a phonemic reconstruction of the echoing noise of Jacob’s footsteps, encoding emitted sound in such a way that its material dispersion can be experienced, lost, and then heard and lost again, but never quite seized or pinned down, never fossilized as ‘History’. The historical trauma of a war that is elsewhere and elsewhen at any given textual or signifying moment, the narrative moment, the moment of production, the moment of reading, nevertheless leaves a referential trace, a performable truth, a ‘remembered future’,²² in the emitted sound that is heard as it is read, gone as soon as it is heard, and is forever elusive and out of reach. The perishing echo of Jacob’s footsteps, the pathos of its evanescent ‘magisterial authority’, is consonant with a kind of truth, speaking of the sudden ‘unconcealment of Being’ and ‘the presence of absence and the absence of presence’.²³

6. The voice of the city

The ear that is attuned to premonitions of war, also hearkens to the fragmented polyphony of urban modernity, to the sounds of mechanization and perpetual motion, to the alien voice of the engine, the unremitting roar of traffic, the rattle of wheel on cobble, the remorseless jangle of the barrel-organ, the pervasive, insomniac hum of the metropolis. The novel is full of references to the sounds of

the street, the 'continuous uproar' (JR 151) of traffic, 'impersonal' and 'unpitying' (JR 148), the music of barrel-organ and military band, the voices of clocks and vendors, the 'whistling and concussions' (JR 151) of street processions.

The barrel-organ is a primitive miracle of inhuman music, a clockwork street-synthesizer, driven by human muscle but eliminating human error, thoroughly determined, yet enslaving its manual operator. It is programmed but oddly autonomous, speaking with an other-worldly voice that is at once primordial and utterly disposable, antiquated and futuristic, insistently present and pathetically, radically remote. It grinds out a music that is full of premonition and déjà-vu, cheap rhapsody, malevolence and instant nostalgia, a music that is sentimental, alien and deranged. It sings the terrible, heartless tune of the street, of indifferent material transaction and exchange, of random depersonalized encounters, and pointlessly intersecting lives. Although it is a kind of recorded music, determined by an inanimate, pin-studded cylinder and turned by a handle, a music that is therefore beyond subtleties of human inflection and intonation, it is still an unrepeatable music, susceptible to variables of tempo, volume and regularity. This impoverished level of singularity, this travesty of nuance, is still, therefore, capable of exercising on the listener the 'power of a loss', depriving the mind of its capacity to 'bind it, associate it', or 'narrativize it', a nuance which, 'as non-formalized matter, escapes the syntheses, both of apprehension and of reproduction'.²⁴ As such it also eludes the discursive syntheses of historical definition, while simultaneously dramatising the intervention of the machine between human subject and human self-expression.

In *Jacob's Room* the music of the barrel-organ is variously 'obscene', sickly-sweet and rhapsodic, a grotesque acoustic epitaph for oblivious Edwardian innocence, and a mocking augury of the holocaust to come, remembering past and future in

the perpetual present of the heard sound. It cheapens and parodies Jacob's trauma when he sees Florinda 'turning up Greek Street upon another man's arm' (JR 81), providing an aural correlative for his humiliating epiphany, enacting a mechanical performance of his soiled, spoiled dreams:

'He let himself in and shut the door, though it was only striking ten on one of the city clocks. No one can go to bed at ten. Nobody was thinking of going to bed. It was January and dismal, but Mrs. Wagg stood on her doorstep, as if expecting something to happen. A barrel-organ played like an obscene nightingale beneath wet leaves. Children ran across the road. Here and there one could see brown panelling inside the hall door... The march that the mind keeps beneath the windows of others is queer enough. Now distracted by brown panelling; now by a fern in a pot; here improvising a few phrases to dance with the barrel-organ; again snatching a detached gaiety from a drunken man; then altogether absorbed by words the poor shout across the street at each other (so outright, so lusty) - yet all the while, having for centre, for magnet, a young man alone in his room' (JR 81-2).

In this passage, the narrative voice, therefore, assembles all of the peripheral elements which make up the particularity of Jacob's inaccessible solitude, its impermeable specificity, so that the lonely space of his room (as imagined from the random activity of the street), his absent presence, is defined and corroborated by the 'obscene', ephemeral song of the barrel-organ, by the shouted words of the poor, the gaiety of a drunken man, as well as by arbitrary and fragmented visual details. The magnetism of Jacob's unknowable moment epitomises the magnetism of the irretrievable historical event, luring the ear and the gaze to a central point, a referential reality which promises knowledge, but which can never be possessed, totalized, or normalized as full presence. The passage tells us that all history is circumstantial, circulating restlessly, impotently, distractedly, around its object. In this sense, the gaze of the historian obliterates 'history', just as Jacob eludes and repels the narrative voice which is magnetically attracted to him and seeks him out, knowing, though, that he is always just out of reach.

History, then, has lost Jacob, displaced him, so to speak, by the act of looking for him. The pursuit of Jacob, the task the novel sets itself, ironically dramatises History's hopeless hunt for itself, with the narrative voice knowing full well that History won't find its object in the places where it looks. Indeed, when Jacob looms largest his absence is at its most compelling. Instead, it is in his absence that we encounter his presence, just as history can only be found in the places where it doesn't look for itself, in its concealments and in the sounds and silences to which it turns a deaf ear. Where it attempts an explanatory or totalizing perspective, claiming possession of its object, where it asserts continuity or intelligible teleological trajectory, it disperses the 'contradictory variety', particularity and specificity of the moment, so that presence is narrowed into prejudice and fixed as partiality.

In Woolf's novel, then, we approach Jacob through the peripheral and the circumstantial, through the particular sounds of the city, for instance, which, somewhere, contains him or has contained him, the noises which he has heard or is hearing, the 'clatter' and the 'clamour' of the street below his room in Athens, or the 'whir of wings as the suburban trains rush into the terminus' (JR 143) at London Bridge. As Rachel Bowlby suggests, the narrator is 'positioned as a detective gathering 'hints',²⁵ reconstructing the history of the subject, Jacob, from the outside, tracing his movements, eavesdropping on his life and the circles through which he has passed. The text listens out for Jacob and finds, in fact, that the 'whole air is tremulous with breathing; elastic with filaments' (JR 143), full of history, replete with clues as to the whereabouts of the present moment.

Fanny Elmer hears history, too, as she sits on a bench in 'Judges Walk looking at Hampstead Garden Suburb' (JR 102). She listens as a dog 'barked, barked, barked, down in the hollow' and 'went on barking'. She hears motor-cars hooting,

a 'far-away rush and humming', children's voices, scattered by the wind, a 'thrush trilling out into the warm air', 'some cry - a workman's whistle', and beyond all of this 'the humming of the wheels and the wind rushing' (JR 102-3). Sound is time in action and 'there's no such thing as silence' (JR 49), but sound can never be cornered or captured, and is perpetually lost in the labyrinth of the ear, an orifice which cannot be closed, so that history must be heard, endured, but ceaselessly surrendered.

Even while he is still a child, Betty Flanders hears the death of her son in the sound of a bell, which is 'the voice of the dead'. 'Sounding at the same moment as the bell, her son's voice mixed life and death inextricably, exhilaratingly' (JR 11). In the synchronization of human voice and tolling bell, the tyranny of linear temporality is undone, so that Betty Flanders is exhilarated by the revelation that presence can only be fully understood in terms of absence, that the loss of being, non-being, also resonates in what Lyotard calls the 'being-now of the heard sound', and future time impregnates the present moment. If, as Gillian Beer suggests, 'the primitive permeates the present day'²⁶ in Woolf's novels, then *Jacob's Room* is also striated with the future, infused with the memory of what is to come. History is perpetual change, but the very perpetuity of this change confers a kind of stasis, in which presence is composed of the shifting, evanescent textures of the moment, but also bears the carnal and vocal traces of the primordial and mementos of futurity.

Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob's Room* is patterned by recurring images of the tolling of bells and the chiming of clocks, which seem to speak as resonantly of sempiternity as of ephemerality. Chapter XI, for instance, which alternates between Paris and Dod's Hill, between Jacob and Betty Flanders, records the inexorable procession of the hours, from four till twelve. But 'the frail waves of sound' of the striking clock are absorbed by the timelessness of the moors, which make no

answer. The 'legends on the tombstones' of the village church are also figured as 'brief voices saying 'I am Bertha Ruck,' 'I am Tom Cage'' (JR 116), voices soon to be joined by that of Jacob Flanders, so that the sempiternal co-exists with the chronological and history becomes an impossible conjunction of inertia and perpetual motion, stasis and temporal slippage. The empty church seems 'full of people', a 'ship with all its crew aboard', the timbers straining to 'hold the dead and the living', whose 'tongues join together in syllabing the sharp-cut words, which forever slice asunder time and the broad-backed moors'. Entity survives emptiness, absence evolves into a species of presence, past and future inhere in the fulness of the fugitive moment.

7. The creak of sex and the 'very moment of history'

The ventriloquial, multitimbral narrator of Woolf's text is not only at times a detective, as Rachel Bowlby suggests, but also on occasions an enlightened kind of historian, sceptical of her own observations, commentary and exegesis, deciphering and processing signs with a strong sense of their ambivalence and epistemological mutability, what Shoshana Felman calls a 'second degree witness', aware of the limitations of what is, in effect, only 'one more topographical and cognitive position'.²⁷ This narrator-historian is explicit, on at least one occasion, about the complexity of the act of witnessing, observing that to witness is also to participate, to will effects into existence, to generate affect, that the particles of history behave as they do by virtue of being observed. The historian as witness is always impelled to 'hum vibrating, like the hawk moth at the mouth of the cavern of mystery', endowing subjects, objects and events with all sorts of 'qualities' they have 'not at all' (JR 61). This is a narrator who questions not only the truth of her observations and her material influence as spectator, but also her capacity to separate one thing from another, to signify anything much at all:

'But though all this may very well be true - so Jacob thought and spoke - so he crossed his legs - filled his pipe - sipped his whiskey, and once looked at his pocket book, rumpling his hair as he did so, there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy - the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history' (JR 61).

Even this simple moment, if its ramifications are pursued, confounds history. The moment is indigestible, impossibly diverse, so history must discriminate, select, and therefore obliterate full presence, or simply founder in the moment's chaotic multiplicity, half of which is 'too dull to repeat', much of which is 'unintelligible', and 'what remains... mostly a matter of guess work' on the part of the second degree witness. To complicate things further, 'consider the effect of sex - how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous, so that here's a valley, there's a peak, when in truth, perhaps, all's as flat as my hand' (JR 61). This suggests not only that the sexual chemistry between two people is impermeable to the third party witness, but, contradictorally, that this third party is voyeuristically implicated, even to the extent of being the author of the erotic charge itself. And so 'we hang vibrating' over our subject or object of scrutiny, creating it with our gaze and making it resonate in sympathy with our own vibrations.

The speculative second-handedness of the historical process is allegorized in an episode which takes place behind closed doors, and is witnessed only by a letter, an 'infinitely brave, forlorn, and lost' text which has to be invested with the human capacities of its author in order for the event to be signified at all. But the 'little creak' and 'sudden stir' coming from behind the door of the bedroom containing Jacob and Florinda, the aural evidence of the 'obscene thing, the alarming presence', is enough to corporealize the incestuous maternal jealousy of Mrs. Flanders even in her absence and ignorance. But such, Woolf seems to imply, are the tortuous and telescoped connections made by history to satisfy its totalizing and

harmonizing appetite, the distortions of its glimpses, the misshearings of its Chinese whispers, its immensifications and erasures, and such are the ludic mysteries and syncopations of absence and presence, time and space.

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***Mrs Dalloway* : remembering, forgetting, being-in-history**

1. Echo and salvage: 'making it up'

Mrs Dalloway can be read as an act of historical salvage, a resurrection of fragments of a single day, which respects the aleatory unconnectedness of 'history'. It is also a narrative *about* the salvage of meaning or connectedness, on the part of its characters, from the 'shredding and slicing' (MD 112) of individual human lives by chronological time. It reconstructs the process of history taking shape, the process of making shapes out of the shapelessness of events. Paradoxically, therefore, it works in defiance of the very model of history which it authenticates, creating pattern out of random encounters and arbitrary concurrences, oscillating (like Aram Veesser's New Historicism) between 'two sorts of contingency',¹ the accidental and the incidental, the one defined as chance, the other as contiguity and sequentiality. In other words, the novel makes 'harmonies' (MD 24) out of history's random inevitability.

It also remembers voices traditionally excluded from History. It salvages the individual thinking and listening subject, 'Clarissa', from the wife and hostess, 'Mrs Richard Dalloway', and Septimus Smith from the anonymity of the shell-shocked case-study, finding moments of sublimity, and not merely madness, in his psychosis, and especially in his uncanny ear for the otherness of noise, the acoustic minutiae of presence. *Mrs Dalloway* is thus about listening both as a practice of being, a technique of the self, and listening as a way of rescuing fugitive personal history, and a timeless prehistory, from the ruins of a patriarchal 'History' which Woolf recognises as hopelessly partial and deficient. It resurrects the relationship between the immediate past of the war and the human subject in a

wilfully amnesiac, profoundly 'unhistorical' epoch, a relationship which can be characterised as a dialogue or oscillation between remembering and forgetting.

The novel begins with a gathering together of different temporalities and with the permeation of the subject, Clarissa Dalloway, by the 'bellow and uproar' of the object world. Future projects, the buying of flowers, the taking of the doors 'off their hinges', acknowledge inescapable linear time, but also reactivate the past through the operations of echo, releasing the utopian, redemptive, 'other' temporality of memory. The 'little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now', represents the past echoing through the present and into the future, so that remembered sound resurrects the eighteen year old girl, who in turn 'gramophonetically' replays the voice of Peter Walsh and an earlier moment of being (tinged with the sublime 'flap of a wave' and the abject 'sense that something awful was about to happen'), while simultaneously anticipating the removal of the doors and the party to come. Time is therefore immediately established as both fluid and static, simultaneously unstable, with hollows, eddies, wormholes, and remorselessly deterministic.

But Mrs Dalloway is also busy constructing 'this moment in June', 'making it up, building it round' herself out of the immediate sensory material at hand, the 'swing, tramp and trudge' of urban modernity, the 'motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs...the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead' (MD 4). Everything is random, but everything is connected, fused in the patterned and sonorous anarchy of the instant, but also moving on in a continual process of loss and salvage, dispersal and possession, sound and echo. This process is epitomized by the striking of Big Ben, the 'indescribable pause' before the predictable concussion, the musical 'warning' preceding the 'irrevocable' hour, followed by the momentary spatialization of sound, the dissolution of the visualized 'leaden circles' in the air,

spiralling backwards and forwards, towards origins and towards oblivion.

Peter Walsh has this same sense of being stranded in the present, divorced from history, of making himself up, moment by moment, as he follows a woman through the 'random uproar' of the traffic, 'across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street', with Clarissa's voice, this time, singing 'in his ears', 'Remember my party, Remember my party' (MD 59). Once again the pattern of loss and salvage, sound and echo, is repeated as he catches himself 'making oneself up; making her up; creating an exquisite amusement', which can never be shared and which is inevitably 'smashed to atoms' as soon as it is constructed. Like Clarissa, he too is consoled, though, by the 'splendid morning', which 'struck straight through the streets', like the 'pulse of a perfect heart' (unlike Clarissa's, 'affected, they said, by influenza'), and by the echo of his boots on the pavement which catachrestically repeat 'no matter', in a similar pattern of dispersion and reverberation, dissolution and recomposition. Eventually, he falls asleep on a bench in Regent's Park, lulled by a lullaby of 'children's voices, the shuffle of feet, and people passing, and humming traffic, rising and falling traffic', slipping out of history and language and back into the sonorous spaces of the unconscious.

The sequence that follows invokes another temporal order, allegorical time or dream time. It tells the tale of the 'solitary traveller' in pursuit of his visions of 'womanhood' and maternity, 'great cornucopias full of fruit', or 'sirens lolloping away on the green sea waves', murmuring in his ear, seeming to offer 'compassion, comprehension, absolution'. But, Woolf suggests, these timeless spaces of the unconscious cannot forget and have been tainted and traumatized by History. The maternal figure sought by the solitary traveller becomes the 'figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world', and semiotic refuge is contaminated and scarred by symbolic time and historical holocaust.

Peter Walsh wakes, saying to himself out loud, 'Lord, Lord! ...The death of the soul' (MD 64), attaching these words to the summer at Bourton, the same summer epiphanically recollected by Clarissa Dalloway at the start of the novel. The memories of the two characters, therefore, spiral towards each other with a kind of aleatory predestination as the trajectories of their diurnal histories converge. But the moment at Bourton and 'this moment in June' are severed from each other by the traumatic event of the war, by a great 'gap in history'.

Meanwhile, the 'violent explosion' of a back-firing car, which puts an end to Mrs Dalloway's sensuous reverie in the flowershop, and which she mistakes for a 'pistol shot' (MD 14), announces that the war is not as 'over' as the 'stirring of galloping ponies' and the 'tapping of cricket bats' suggests. Rumours as to the occupancy of the car, which brings Bond Street and Oxford Street to a standstill, provide the connection between Mrs Dalloway and the character of Septimus Smith, whose chronic hyperaesthesia and aural and visual hallucinations are symptomatic of his undiagnosed shell-shock. The backfiring car is an audible echo of war as well as a visible extension (right down to the anonymity of the occupants) of the mysterious powers and authorities in whose name the war has been prosecuted. As Gillian Beer suggests, the car in *Mrs Dalloway* is a symbol of patriarchal authority, of hierarchy and class, its interior closed off by a 'male hand' drawing a blind, cocooning anonymous, arbitrary privilege within an inscrutable, secret 'inside'. The aeroplane, on the other hand, with its 'strange high singing', and later with its playful writing in the sky, is an 'image of "free will" and ecstasy, silent, erotic and absurd', offering communal, 'free access to meaning'², providing Septimus Smith, for example, with a sublime moment of 'unimaginable beauty' (MD 23).

The same 'violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump' is the cue for

Septimus Smith to construct, and be constructed by, his version of the historical moment, one of abject and portentous horror. The arrival of the enigmatic car brings everything to a standstill, signifying not only the 'mystery' of authority, but, as it were, suspending History in the present of the sonorous moment, paralysing linear time in a 'cessation of happening',³ and stranding Septimus Smith in the 'massive presence of monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape'.⁴ Gridlock, and the 'throb of motor engines', sounding 'like a pulse drumming through an entire body', combine with the 'extraordinarily hot' sun and the sense of a temporal and spatial blockage, a 'gradual drawing together of everything to one centre'.

This produces in Septimus a kind of existential nausea, or abjection, a sense of such imminent catastrophe and bloated, uncanny superfluity that the 'world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames', in a spontaneous combustion of the present. Instead of 'making himself up', moment by moment, the present for Septimus is over-determined, the suffocating product of an inexorable process, pointing to an inescapable and apocalyptic 'now'. And yet what is a source of unbearable, combustible exorbitance for Septimus Smith is merely the occasion for rumour, diversion and speculation to other witnesses and bystanders, demonstrating what Shoshana Felman describes as the unbreachable '*incommensurability* of different topographical and cognitive positions',⁵ and the irretrievable dispersal of the moment of history amidst a multiplicity of equally authentic subject positions and subject-object interpenetrations.

These different subject positions, therefore, pluralize the chronological moment, making up its difference out of discrepancies and dissonances, out of the polyphony of lived, sensual experience, 'pulverizing and multiplying unity',⁶ rather than conforming to the monological voice of masculine History. The lives of the

principle characters, Septimus Smith, Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh, echo each other and intersect under the auspices of two types of contingency (aleatory and contiguous), therefore, in the manner of a three-part invention, a fugue or an arabesque, occasionally converging and harmonizing in a kind of accidental confluence, but equally determined by their own random singularity. At the same time, the novel is patterned by an interplay between the impulse to forget and the imperative to remember the trauma of the Great War.

Univocal History is additionally fractured by the echoes of other memories, by the echoes of unlived personal histories, shadows of unrealized trajectories and unresolved traumas, by echoes of a timeless prehistoric temporality (expressed most explicitly by the 'battered woman' (MD 88) at Regent's park Tube Station), and by the echo of future generations, symbolized by Mrs. Dalloway's daughter, Elizabeth. Echo, repetition and intersection, therefore, are the structural principles by which the novel reconstructs history, salvaging it from the ruins of History.

2. The ear of Septimus Smith: trauma and the 'vortex of the unhistorical'

In his study of the effect of the First World War on English Culture, *A War Imagined*, Simon Hynes argues that the war was quickly mythologised as a radical break with the past, and that the 'essential post-war myth of history' was built around a sense of the 'distant pastness of the pre-war past, and of its annihilation in the great gap of the war'.⁷ Whatever its social, political, economic, or cultural causes, World War One came to be imagined as an apocalyptic 'gap in history'. 'Discontinuity became a part of English imaginations' (ix), and the pre-war Edwardian era came to be idealised as an inaccessible, wholly separate, and Edenic past, despite the self-evident continuity of the great secular and religious institutions of the state, the

persistence of material inequality, and a largely unaltered class structure.

C.F.G. Masterman, for example, in his analysis *England After the War*, published in 1923, writes of the 'greatest secular catastrophe which has tormented mankind since the fall of Rome'.⁸ Similarly, H.G. Wells, in the monumental *Outline of History* (1920), describes a 'destruction of fixed ideas, prejudices, and mental limitations unparalleled in all history'.⁹ Reviewing Wells' book, E. M. Forster comments that 'Our 'own' times, as they are ironically termed, are anything but ours; it is as though a dead object, huge and incomprehensible, had fallen across the page, which no historical arts can arrange, and which bewilders us as much by its shapelessness as by its size'.¹⁰ There is a strong sense in all of these comments of a culture which imagines itself dehistoricized, dispossessed of its own history, and stranded in what Nietzsche has called 'the little vortex' of the 'unhistorical'.¹¹

At the same time, the immediate post-war years were marked by a kind of evasiveness and wilful historical amnesia, a longing for distraction and anaesthetic. This narcotic impulse was marked by an appetite for what Alison Light describes as 'a literature of convalescence', which she sees as typified by the novels of Agatha Christie and the genre of the 'Whodunnit'.¹² This combination of denial, escapism or evasion, along with a sense of discursive impotence and epistemological incoherence are characteristic responses to trauma:

'Trauma is precisely the gap - the open wound - in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonized in the present. In a sense it is a nothing that remains unnameable.'¹³

Dominick La Capra's definition of trauma echoes Forster's version of contemporary history as 'a dead object, huge and incomprehensible'. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is pervaded by just this sense of enormous, unresolved, and

unnameable trauma, with the character of Septimus Smith in particular simultaneously weighed down by the 'dead object' of a history which others have wilfully forgotten, and locked into the 'little vortex' of the unhistorical present. Septimus Smith, the psychotic shell-shock case, is thus the peculiarly burdened product and bearer of a history which can only be conceived of as an absence, a 'nothing that remains unnameable'. Belonging to, and carrying the traces of, an obliterated historical moment, he is therefore profoundly anachronistic, incarcerated in the 'unhistorical' present, but incapable of being fully absorbed back into it. He is a 'relic, straying on the edge of the world', an 'outcast', gazing back at the 'inhabited regions', lying like 'a drowned sailor on the shore of the world' (MD 101-102). He represents the historical conflict between remembering and forgetting (which is itself a crisis of History) made flesh, a crisis whose critical encounter was that between the returning veterans and the post-war domestic world. The tension between commemoration and amnesia is epitomized by the ritualization of remembrance and the sacralization of the war dead, which helped suppress any genuine critique of the war itself:

... the theme of remembrance permeated British society during the period between the First and Second World Wars and resulted in the denial of any political critique of the Great War or of post-war society from the perspective of popular expectation or aspiration which, elsewhere, took the form of revolution or nationalism. (Myths of the English 137).¹⁴

Rituals of remembrance centred around statistics of loss, in the registration of the names of the dead and in Rolls of honour. The ultimate untranslatableability of these lists of proper names, combined with the ritualization of remembrance and the desire to forget meant that the historical trauma of the war remained largely unfronted, suspended as an unnameable other.

As Eric Leed points out, 'in the experience of war the "home" became more alien

than the enemy'.¹⁵ The sustained sense of alienation experienced by many veterans is reflected in the fact that 'more pensions for psychotic illnesses were granted by the British government in 1929 than had been granted in the four years immediately after the war',¹⁶ suggesting that 'neurosis was a way-station on the way to a more fundamental break with reality'. In peacetime the ratio between neurosis and psychosis was reversed from that of the war years, while there was a significant rise in the number of cases of schizophrenia in the period immediately following the armistice. Leed notes that 'there are numerous examples of men coming home either "normal" or with a slight hysteria to end up, four years later, as schizophrenics'.¹⁷

Hysteria and neurosis, in turn, were substantially the product of the 'roaring chaos' and 'deafening sound and vibration of the barrage', which 'effected a kind of hypnotic condition that shattered any rational pattern of cause and effect', destroying 'any sense of temporal sequence', in a quite literal repudiation of history. The 'sheer volume of noise that dominated the front was experienced as supremely disorienting', and this 'dominance of sound, and the impossibility of effective, active defence produced a notion of the relationship between individuals and the forces that governed them that seems much closer to magic than to any technological spirit'.¹⁸

Sound, science, and magic are conflated in one of Septimus Smith's delusions, namely his 'marvellous discovery' that 'the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life!' (MD 24), a delusion founded on a distorted version of causality and a notion of temporality confined to the evidence of the present moment. His psychosis is depicted in the novel in terms of delusions, hallucinations and disordered or heightened perceptions, but his susceptibility to the physical properties of noise,

and especially noise dissociated from the significations of language, is particularly emphatic. Indeed he enters the novel through an involuntary act of eavesdropping, overhearing the voice of Edgar J. Watkiss saying 'audibly, humorously of course: 'The Proime Minister's kyar.'" (MD 15). The insistence of 'audibly' and the meticulous registration of accent foreground not only the particularity of the utterance, but also the accuracy and sensitivity of the ear of Septimus Smith, who 'heard him', and registers the peculiarity of the voice. This arbitrary incident immediately establishes Septimus' vulnerability to the aleatory and inescapable quality of noises, out of which he typically manufactures instant narratives in an attempt to make coherent sequence, to restore himself to history.

But if he is an abject victim of arbitrary, ephemeral sound, as well as the 'historical' product of the barrage, Septimus is also the beneficiary of the sublime experience of presence available to the subject through the 'being-now' of the heard sound, and peculiarly available to the unhistorical subject, who 'perceives as he has never perceived before' from his 'little vortex of life', and whose 'valuations are altered and disvalued'.¹⁹ Occasionally, he is able to find a 'luxury' in his solitude, 'an isolation full of sublimity' (MD 101). One such sublime moment occurs as Septimus is watching an aeroplane writing in the sky, the smoke words 'bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty' (MD 23):

'K...R...' said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say 'Kay Arr' close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper's, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound, which, concussing, broke.' (MD 24)

The aeroplane, an 'image of 'free will' and ecstasy, silent, erotic and absurd',²⁰ is succeeded by the erotic vibration of the human voice, in which the verbal is

displaced by the vocal and the symbolic dissolves into the semiotic. This passage, with its mutation of letters into sounds, dramatizes the splitting of the 'sound image / sight image solidarity', described by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, whereby the 'deject' experiences 'coenesthesia', or 'direct semantization of acoustic, tactile, motor, visual' stimuli.²¹ Indeed, Kristeva's 'deject', or subject experiencing abjection, and Nietzsche's 'unhistorical' subject seem to merge in the character of Septimus Smith, the psychotic casualty of unnameable historical trauma, whose delusions can be seen as desperate attempts to write himself back into the history of which he is product, to make coherence out of disconnection and chaos:

'Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion - ' (MD 24).

Instead of signs becoming sounds, as in the episode of the letters written in the sky, sounds (and silences) are here taken as signs, in a 'direct sematization' of the acoustic, producing a dislocated, irrational syllogism, in which contingency is mistaken for causality in a parody of historical method.

Septimus' attempts to re-enter history could also be said to founder on the conflation of incompatible epistemological models, or species of history. On the one hand his messianic delusions of omnipotence tell him that he has been inserted into an equivalent of Nietzsche's 'monumental' history of great men,²² that he has been entrusted with the 'supreme secret' (MD 74) of human history and destiny, delivered to him through the natural world in a series of voices and codes. Indiscriminate perceptions of contingent events are translated into the signifiers of a monumental, deterministic schematization of events. On the other hand, he attempts to sustain a scientific rationalism, to anchor his perceptions in the particular specificity of material reality. His experience of the world, therefore,

oscillates between these two alternatives, micro-narrative and mythic metanarrative, or science and magic, the respective realities of the home front and the trenches:

‘He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shephard boy’s piping (That’s an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe, and then as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath’ (MD 75).

Here, reason provides a ‘muttered’, impoverished and banal commentary alongside Septimus’ mythic, synaesthetic realisation of the physical and spatial violence of sound. Rational systems of identification, category and classification break down, with Septimus transposing the deranged epistemology of the battlefield, with its ‘roaring chaos’, its reorientation of faculties, and its transgression of the distinctions between ‘life and death, man and machine, and human and animal’,²³ and then a surreal (and inadvertently ironic) pastoral vision, onto the comparatively mundane events of the post-war world. These transpositions of sound can be heard as the irruptions of a suppressed history, reverberations of a traumatic, psychotic episode, which has been imperfectly sublimated. And Septimus is not alone in hearing the traces of this suppressed history, the echoes of barrage, explosion and cacophany. As we have seen, Clarissa Dalloway mistakes a backfiring car for a pistol shot, hindering her earlier attempts to ‘forget’ the war and affirm continuity:

‘...it was over; thank Heaven - over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it...’ (MD 5)

This strenuous, over-determined assertion of closure, and affirmation of the continuity of Edwardian values, subverts itself. The emphatic certainty implied by the repetition of 'over' is undermined partly through the hesitancy suggested by the punctuation, the semi-colon and the dash. As Patricia Laurence argues, in *The Reading of Silence*, the dash is a 'device that invites the reader's participation; it is a riddle in the story only to be filled in as the reader understands the meaning of silences'.²⁴ In this case, and for this reader, the momentary delay suggests doubt, or perhaps the denial of doubt, an ambiguity that is sustained rather than dispersed by the abrupt lunge into the assertion of simple certainties. The stark and disjointed statements, 'It was June. The King and Queen were at the palace', seem to seek the reassurance of continuity, but also suggest anxiety and uncertainty, as if by asserting these things, their 'truth' can be assured. This over-emphatic attempt to forget the war prepares us for the moment when it is again remembered, making itself heard in the 'violent explosion' which startles Mrs. Dalloway and introduces Septimus Smith.

In a sense, the intensity of the desire for continuity with what went before the war only serves to foreground the difference and disjunction between the present and the past, and the subtle but radical discontinuity between them. Peter Walsh, for instance, notices that 'people looked different. Newspapers seemed different' (MD 78). It is as if reverence for the past somehow intensifies the past's disintegration in the present, as if the 'antiquarian' model of history described by Nietzsche in *Untimely Meditations* is modulating into the 'systematic dissociation' of identity and continuity described by Foucault in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*.²⁵

3. Moments of being: being-in-history

Each of the three major characters in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa, Peter Walsh and Septimus Smith, experiences something that closely resembles the 'moments of being' described by Woolf in *A Sketch of the Past*, which in turn can be related to Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. What is particularly significant is the way in which these epiphanic moments intersect with the novel's sense of history, the way that intensified experiences of the present demand to be read as privileged, intimate and meaningful experiences of history as synchronic process, revelations of being-in-history. Woolf's novel realises, along with Benjamin, that 'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now'.²⁶

Moments of being can be characterised as heightened, revelatory experiences of the self in the world, experiences which are sublimely or menacingly replete with an aporetic significance. The first part of *A Sketch of the Past*, the autobiographical text which most explicitly ventilates her ideas about moments of being, concerns Woolf's early childhood. This is reconfigured in terms of aural, spatial and visual memories, and is described as a kind of liberating emptiness, in which are suspended capsules of vivid, sometimes violent experience which can be re-lived as 'more real than the present moment': ²⁷

'Many bright colours; many distinct sounds; some human beings, caricatures; comic; several violent moments of being, always including a circle of the scene which they cut out: and all surrounded by a vast space - that is a rough visual description of childhood.' (SP 79)

Moments of being, therefore, can be distinguished from the more prolific moments of 'non-being' in which they are 'embedded' by their capacity to 'shock', their promise or delivery of 'a revelation of some order', and their recognisability as 'tokens of some real thing behind appearances', some 'pattern behind the cotton wool' of habitual, automatic, regulated experience. They are usually characterised

by a peculiar unity, dissociated from the experiences surrounding them by a different sense of temporality, a kind of persistence and insistence of the present, with past and future revealed as remote and inaccessible (though, paradoxically, these moments can be revisited and vividly re-experienced through the operations of memory). They are often accompanied by a deep, sometimes traumatic sense of unreality, an abrupt and profound defamiliarization of the material world, during which the self becomes vulnerable to an overload of indeterminate and chaotic signification:

‘There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something...the whole world became unreal. Next, the other moment when the idiot boy sprang up with his hand outstretched mewling, slit-eyed and red-rimmed; and without saying a word, with a sense of horror in me, I poured into his hand a bag of Russian toffee. But it was not over, for that night in the bath the dumb horror came over me. again I had that hopeless sadness; that collapse I have decribed before; as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off, so that I huddled up at the end of my bath, motionless.’ (SP 78)

Interestingly, the ‘moment of the puddle’, which is here accompanied by a sense of paralysing horror, resurfaces in one of Woolf’s short stories, *The Evening Party*, but this time transfigured into a sublime revelation of completion and ‘certainty’, with the ‘universe’ frozen momentarily into ‘a solid ball of crystal’ in which ‘the tears and powdered ashes of generations’ are ‘clotted’.²⁸ Also, on this occasion, the subject is able successfully to step ‘across the puddle’, triggering the ‘imperceptible shock’ of the epiphanic moment, so that the disabling, ephemeral alienation of the autobiographical record is transformed into a material image of solidified ‘happiness’, the ‘crystal globe’, in the fictional work. Indeed, Woolf explicitly acknowledges this process of neutralising and transfiguring the ‘dumb horror’ of these disturbing experiences in *A Sketch of the Past* :

It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps it is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what....'

Much of the horror seems to reside in the incoherence, and the incoherence, by definition, dissolves with its patterning in language. In *A Sketch of the Past*, therefore, and perhaps even more so in the diaries, it seems clear that Woolf is not so much recording experience as shaping and constructing it, salvaging shape and significance from anarchic superfluity, assembling identity, as Linda Anderson suggests, through the process of writing itself:

'What emerges is very much a 'subject-in-process', to borrow Kristeva's useful term, a subject constructing herself through a writing which aims consistently and courageously towards the unknown. Within this writing images of space recur: perhaps not surprisingly since for Woolf to attempt to construct a female subject was to encounter space, the space of absence or the as yet unthought of space in which this subject could appear.'²⁹

The image of crystal globes which 'dissolve as one holds them', a material metaphor for an intangible, transitory revelation, suggests a momentary substantiation of just such a space, solidified, transparent and inviolate, during which the self is experienced as 'absolute and entire', yet still somehow mysterious.

What emerges from this brief exploration of moments of being, then, is not only a sense of the 'subject-in process', but a sense of that subject experiencing the inchoate flux of history as process, a cross-section of history, or a synchronic snapshot of the diachronic, unmediated, so to speak, by language. The process of writing about such moments, therefore, of salvaging pattern and even sublimity out

of abjection, and accomodating the raw phenomenality of history-as-process, becomes a practice of history, a historiographical discovery of 'what belongs to what', and the production of a privileged form of history.

In terms of the history of the subject, moments of being relate to a pre-history, to the regime of the semiotic chora, which both prefigures and permeates the symbolic code. The historian of moments of being, therefore, is historian as semiotician, orchestrator, chronicler and archivist of the 'pulsional incidents' within language. The historian-semiotician is thus, substantially, a listening historian, one who hears a 'pattern' through the 'cotton-wool', a historian of sound. This is not so outrageous a claim as it might appear. After all, the classical and medieval sciences of the *quadrivium* equate time with music, from which the extrapolated equation of history and sound is not such a radical leap. Music, as de Man puts it, is the 'diachronic version of the pattern of non-coincidence within the moment', a 'persistently frustrated intent toward meaning'.³⁰ In its intrinsic, radical ephemerality, sound is the indispensable index of the 'now', which in turn is the object of future history. Like Benjamin's historical materialist, Woolf is a historian who 'establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.'³¹ As precise, meticulous and searching reconstructions of the now, which foreground their own rhetoricity, Woolf's fictional writings are, therefore, a peculiarly authentic species of historiography.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, Woolf as historian-semiotician orchestrates the privileged moments of being-in-history of Septimus Smith through the perpetually receptive orifice of the ear, in a language whose authenticity as 'history' derives as much from its sounds, silences and rhythms as from its semantic or symbolic 'content'. Historico-semiotic method and the essence of being-in-history fuse in a passage which has already been examined:

'Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion - (MD 24)

Septimus hears preordination in contingency, the paradox of the predestined accident, which is the crux of being-in-history. In a concise statement and demonstration of her method, as well as a diagnosis of Septimus' experience, Woolf affirms the significance of silences, proceeding to intersperse several of them, significantly, between notational inscriptions of sounds. The abbreviated form of the final stage of this syllogism, 'All taken together meant the birth of a new religion -', suggests the breathless rapidity of Septimus' thought, while the final dash indicates not only interruption, but looming space and the vertiginous nature of the logic. The 'madness' of the conclusion could be said to stem partly from a superimposition of 'traditional' masculine, monological history, with its fixation on cause and effect, onto the abject sense of being-in-history, history as synchronicity. Septimus applies the linear, sequential form of the former to the semiotic 'material' of the latter, to produce an aberration of logic. But this aberration is certainly no more outlandish than a sequence which begins with the murder of an archduke, proceeds through the industrial slaughter of the trenches, and ends with a shell-shock victim staring at an aeroplane advertising toffee in the sky. The absurdity of Septimus' reading of events parallels the inherent absurdity of sequential historical narrative itself, which tells the 'sequence of events like the beads of a rosary'.³²

In another of Septimus' significant moments of being-in-history, Woolf highlights the sense of suspension, imminence and portent, which Julia Kristeva associates with the 'massive uncanniness' of abjection:

'...and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder, and the sleeper

feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.' (MD 75)

There is a powerful feeling in this passage of the indifferent forces of history converging with sudden and inexplicable purpose on the 'now', a feeling inscribed in what Kristeva calls the 'sentence melody', the surge of the 'intonational curve' (Powers 192), as much as in the discursive 'content' of the writing.³³ Phonemes resound, echo and accumulate, 'chime and chatter' in an 'overflowing' of clause and phrase, so that an 'affect bursts out, in sound and outcry, bordering close on drive and abjection as well as fascination. Bordering on the unnameable.'³⁴ History is unveiled in all of its senseless vitality as 'music, rhythm, rigadon, without end, for no reason.'

Mrs. Dalloway's moments of being are similarly intense encounters with history, history suspended as raw, textural, phenomenal process. These encounters can be imagined, stored and revisited to form the 'scaffolding' of personal identity. At the 'very heart of the moment' Mrs. Dalloway experiences the same sense of a convergence of history at the singular point of the present, so that 'this June morning' is shaped under 'the pressure of all the other mornings' (MD 40). Such moments of 'illumination' can be triggered by 'accidental' sensations, a 'faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments)', becoming 'swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture' (MD 34-5).

One of Mrs. Dalloway's most powerful experiences of being-in-history, one which emphatically affirms an alternative, cyclical temporality, occurs as she is sewing, occasioned by the rhythms of 'drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause':

'So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying 'that is all' more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking.' (MD 43)

Mrs. Dalloway's absorption into timeless, synchronic, cyclical history is effected through the ear and through the body, the beat of the heart tuning to the rhythm of the waves, in a rising and falling, pausing and surging pattern. The precise intonational and lexical composition reproduces the pulse of the body, the swelling and breaking of the waves, and the sibillant drag of the shingle, before culminating in the insistent onomatopoeic 'barking'. 'Fear no more, says the heart' is an exact cardiac throb which beats throughout the book, simultaneously embracing and repelling chronological time and affirming that history happens in the human body as much as in palaces and parliaments, in corporeal cycles and organic rhythms as well as in legislation, warfare and the imperial chimes of Big Ben.

In this passage, then, the somatic and the aural merge in a reconfiguration of time and space, so that the 'singular space of the visual is transformed by the experience of sound to a plural space'. Our sense of Mrs. Dalloway as a self is 'imaged not as a point, but as a membrane, not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel'.³⁵ The novel itself, Woolf's history of a June day, is similarly multi-dimensional, moving from one consciousness to another, from subjects to objects, from linear chronology to cyclical, subjective time. It also combines moments of being-in-history, historiography as attention to the semiotic, with a portrait of trauma, an account of a culture torn between remembering and forgetting.

4. The aural archive

If *Mrs. Dalloway* is multi-temporal it is also multitimbral and polyphonic, composed of a huge range of sound references, vocal timbres, gaps, breaks and silences, rhythms and tempos, and verbal patterns, sonorities and tonalities. This repertoire or archive of sound can usefully be separated into three broad categories, which in turn correspond to different orders of historicity. Firstly, there is the narrative transcription or notation of noises, recording the source, timbre, pitch, volume, frequency and general qualities of inhuman and mechanical sounds. The persistent use of onomatopoeia and repetition, and the exploitation of the intonational or suprasegmental potential of sentences reconstructs the original or putative sound event, resurrecting the immediacy and ephemerality of the historical moment. The reading process re-enacts the reverberation and dispersal of the sonorous event, producing a 'historical' record or trace of peculiar spatial and temporal authenticity. The spatial and temporal dimensions of the event are, so to speak, modelled in language.

Secondly, Woolf scrupulously manufactures and records the operations of the human voice. Not only does she construct the quality and nuance of spoken utterance and the idiolectal features of individual voices, she also registers the inner voices of her characters and the timbres of suppressed utterances and unspoken thoughts, interrogating the assumptions made by orthodox history about silence. The supposed objectivity of this orthodox history is revealed as the partisan exclusion and marginalization of the individual subject, the tyranny of the voice that speaks over the voice that doesn't, so that the disregard of silence effectively becomes the imposition of silence. The historicism of *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, is a historicism which listens to the 'sound' and meaning of the unsounded human voice, as well as hearing the vocal within the verbal, a historicity which

confers validity on the psychological realities of the individual human subject.

The third category in this aural archive is to do with the semiotic. The semiotic is to be detected in phonematic and melodic devices, in rhythm, sentence melody and intonation, silence, absence and repetition, and a whole associated acoustic repertoire, what Barthes calls the 'pulsional incidents' and 'carnal stereophony' of the genotext, which evoke the presence of the 'human muzzle' and speak to the ear.³⁶ Woolf's cadences also evoke elemental natural rhythms, the sounds and pulses of body and ocean, the properties of diurnal and cyclical time, the corporeality of thought and language. This 'carnal stereophony' operates on both local and structural levels, on a grand, symphonic scale as well as at the level of the pulsional incident and the sentence melody. A third, more radical historicity, then, can be said to be lodged within the semiotic textures and overarching polyphonic structure of the novel.

5. Listening to the inhuman

In terms of the first of these categories, the mechanical sounds of urban modernity are fully represented in *Mrs. Dalloway*, with frequent references to the 'random uproar' of traffic, the 'bellow', 'throb' and hum of 'carriages, motor cars, omnibuses', the 'roar' of vans, and the sound of motor horns blaring. The noise of an aeroplane is described as a 'strange high singing' (MD 4), and later as boring 'ominously into the ears of the crowd' (MD 21). Septimus, standing in the street where 'vans roared past him' and 'brutality blared out on placards', compares the sobbing of his wife, Rezia, to 'a piston thumping'. The man-made noise of the street saturates space and recalls the noise of the battlefield in its violence, pervasiveness and alterity, with its peculiar inhumanity belying its human origins. It is somehow neither entirely within human control, nor purely insentient. It is inorganic yet

animated and purposeful, seemingly belonging neither to nature nor to culture. It happens 'out there', yet originates from within, in human invention, and is heard inside the labyrinth of the ear. It destabilizes the fundamental oppositions between life and death, human and machine, inside and outside, nature and culture:

'The vulnerability to the alterity of sound - or to sound as the sign of alterity - is a vulnerability to the doubled self of the man-made; man-made sound emanates from 'us', but assails and pervades us from an enigmatically indefinite 'out there'.'³⁷

Mechanical music and the recorded voice, too, destabilize the borders between animate and inanimate, life and death. Exosomatic auditory technologies like the gramophone, the telephone and even the barrel organ 'make the dead speak' in that they 'make the dead world of matter the bearer of meaning', providing it with 'a fetishistic kind of life'.³⁸ In that such technologies can preserve the speaking voice, the dead can also literally continue to speak through them. In *Ulysses*, for instance, Bloom reflects on the possibility of an archive of the voices of the dead, with a 'gramophone on every grave'. Steven Connor usefully differentiates between the 'active and excursive self-augmentation of the voice' offered by the telephone, and the 'deathly passivity' of the voice's mechanical replication by the gramophone or phonograph. He argues that the two technologies are 'strongly gendered as masculine and feminine respectively', and that the dichotomy between the 'androtelephonic and gynophonographic' later surfaces in the 'asymmetries' of male and female voices in the 'Hollywood sound-film', a point also explored by Kaja Silverman.³⁹

Acoustic technologies are not as substantially represented in *Mrs. Dalloway* as in *Jacob's Room* or *Between the Acts*, but there are one or two significant references. Septimus Smith, for instance, is reduced to tears by the sound of a

barrel organ from the street, which he hears as a sublime music (MD 154), an amplification consistent with his other aural and visual hallucinations. On another occasion, Rezia's mention of a gramophone prompts him to open his eyes to see if it 'was really there' (MD 155). Here, the gramophone as an 'exact' physical object, complete with 'green trumpet', seems to have a significant effect on Septimus, promising a stabilization of the object world and a release from hallucination. Indeed, the gramophone is a technology which makes fugitive sound visible, in the form of the inscribing needle and the concrete sound box, as well as relatively permanent in that the recorded sound can be repeated. The auditory envelope surrounding the gramophone also, perhaps, recalls the sonorous envelope of the maternal voice, but with the additional control peculiar to the machine. In both scenarios, the potentially disturbing paradox of dead matter speaking is offset by a partial but comforting power over the ephemerality of sound.

The most insistent inhuman 'voices' of the novel, however, are those of the bells of Big Ben and St. Margaret's Church, which intone the hours throughout the novel, registering the imposition of arbitrary patriarchal chronology on the subjective temporalities of human subjects. Rachel Bowlby has shown how Big Ben in the novel is linked to national institutions, regulating the 'lifeless national parade of conformity and discipline.' She points out that this imperial time is 'undermined not only by the discontinuous temporalities of the various characters and the double time which they live, but more literally by the belated chiming of other clocks which challenge or mock the precision of Big Ben's time-keeping', and particularly St. Margaret's clock, which 'being the voice of the hostess', is linked to Clarissa Dalloway. This ironic doubling is disruptive and challenging, as well as 'complementary' and 'lightly mocking'.⁴⁰ Imperial time and orthodox history are thus satirized by this subversive spillage or deviation from the inflexible authority of linear chronology.

Woolf reserves her most violent imagery, however, for the clocks of Harley Street, which 'nibbled at the June day, and whose 'shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing', counselled submission and 'upheld authority' (MD 112). This is time and history as rapacious predators, consuming the day and carving up human lives. On the other hand, authentic history, subjective time and the textures of being, the the novel suggests, surreptitiously fill the empty gaps marked out by the imperial clock, weaving irregular patterns against the grain of that homogenising process, and colonising the spaces of time with the uneven suspensions, dispersions, and incongruities of the now.

Woolf is also concerned to register the materiality of inhuman sounds, visualizing their physical movement and mysterious dispersal through space, and the violent collisions of sounds and objects. Thus, each time Big Ben strikes, Woolf describes how 'the leaden circles dissolved in the air', while the chime of St. Margaret's 'glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound' (MD 54). Septimus hears music 'clanging' against rocks, while the voice of the old woman at Regent's Park Tube Station is an 'invincible thread of sound wound up into the air like the smoke from a cottage chimney' (MD 90-91). These physicalised descriptions help to confirm sound as the viable material of history, but also reveal the continuing primacy of the visual over the aural, the surviving hegemony of the 'scopic regime', despite a reorientation of 'psychological lives' in favour of sound rather than sight, engendered by the First World War and the development of acoustic technology.⁴¹

The novel is additionally textured by a miscellaneous range of acoustic effects and details. Mrs. Dalloway imagines the 'barking and barking' of dogs on a beach; Septimus hears the 'barking and howling' of animals at the zoo (MD 27), and a mouse squeaking (MD 159); Peter Walsh hears the 'regular thudding sound of

boys in uniform', which 'drummed his thoughts', and notices the sound of his boots on the pavement, and the 'shuffle of feet' (MD 61) outside Regent's Park (though he doesn't reflect explicitly on the war, an omission that speaks of wilful forgetfulness). Many of these references relate to the characters' sense of the evanescence of the moment, their elusive feeling of being-in-history. There are also numerous and various stirrings, hummings, tappings, murmurings, squeakings, rustlings, and so on, minute acoustic fragments of the now, which further enrich the aural experience of the novel, encrusting it with a special particularity and deepening its historicity.

6. Listening to the voice

Mrs. Dalloway, like all of Woolf's novels (to a greater or lesser extent), is a symphony of harmonious and dissonant voices. Discourse is, so to speak, taken up by a relay of voices, by turns diegetic, mimetic, didactic, 'rhetorical' and satirical. Indeed, these distinctions often blur in Woolf's work, with combinations of voices existing side by side in a single passage or sentence. The demarcation between character and narrator, for example, is especially indistinct in her depiction of interiority, where the consciousness of a character may be represented by a combination of narrated and quoted monologue, punctuated with voiced and unvoiced utterances, interruptions, suspensions and silences.⁴² The boundary between the interiority and exteriority can be similarly blurred, notably and dramatically in the case of Septimus Smith, but also more generally, so that objects, sounds and memories move in and out of the consciousnesses of the characters in a mixture of the sensory and the cognitive.

The voice provides a peculiarly appropriate site for representing this dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside, since sounded utterance is heard at the same time as it is emitted. The subject's own voice enters the ear from outside, but

originates and reverberates in the body at the moment of utterance, so that it is also heard inside the head and throat. This simultaneity of the aural and the vocal 'makes it difficult to situate the voice, to know whether it is "outside" or "inside" '.⁴³ Woolf's orchestration of voices, therefore, releases subjectivity from its bodily limits, so that subjects (including the narrating subject) spill into each other, and into objects, spaces, and perceptions, just as there is a reciprocal permeation of the subject and the spaces of consciousness by the object. The verbal flux of Woolf's fiction, therefore, is also, crucially, a vocalic flux, directed at the ear and 'performed' by the reader.

The range of manifestations of the human voice in *Mrs. Dalloway* can be illustrated by examining the 'utterances' of Rezia Smith. Rezia's vocalizations can be arranged in a graduated progression from the soundlessness of unvoiced and narrated interior monologue, to the sounded, exclamatory cry. In between the poles of silence and sounded cry come the quoted interior monologue or unvoiced thought, the suppressed utterance, and then a whole repertoire of sounded utterances, marked by a range of reported speech indicators, gathering in volume from mutterings and murmurs to the full-blooded cry. The prolific incidence of 'cry' or 'cried' as a speech indicator in Woolf's work would, generally speaking, seem to be an index of repression, suggesting as it does the release of intense sentiment, the blurting out of emotions or ideas that can no longer be contained. Another favoured indicator, 'murmur' or 'murmured', by the same token, suggests timidity of utterance, perhaps an index of the pervasive oppression of the speaking subject.

The passage of the novel from the introduction of the Smiths to the episode of the sky-writing aeroplane encompasses virtually the entire vocalic range outlined above. Rezia's first three voiced utterances are all brief and simple instructions, 'Let us go on, Septimus', 'Come on', 'Now we will cross'. The banality of these

words contrasts starkly with the intensity, diversity and anguish of her 'inner' voices (though only the former would qualify as 'historical' evidence). Woolf's narration here is a combination of short and infrequent bursts of reported speech, or mimesis, diegetic explanatory passages, and a complex representation of Rezia's consciousness, made up of quoted interior monologue, narrated monologue, and what Patricia Laurence calls 'psycho-narration', which is 'the narrative discourse about a character's consciousness intertwining narrator and character':⁴⁴

'People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were people now, because Septimus had said, 'I will kill myself'; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help! Help! she wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help!' (MD 16-17)

The passage begins with quoted monologue, modulates into narrated monologue ('...which she admired in a way'), then a hybrid of the two (Laurence's 'psycho-narration'), ending with what seem to be suppressed utterances, 'Help! Help!'. In a note to *Word, Dialogue, and Novel* Julia Kristeva expresses a certain amount of scepticism about the whole concept of the interior monologue in 'texts that pretend to reconstitute the so-called physical reality of "verbal flux"'.⁴⁵ The interiority of the western subject, she argues, is reduced to 'limited literary effect (confessional form, continuous psychological speech, automatic writing)'. Conversely, it could be argued (as Derrida might have it) that interiority is the product of literary, and other written, effects. Kristeva's caveat notwithstanding, the narrative structures (or voices) adopted by Woolf fill in what Benjamin calls the 'empty time' of History with 'the presence of the now'.⁴⁶

Kristeva seems right to suggest, however, that the narrative articulation of thought is a linguistic or literary representation of something far less articulate. Woolf

conveys the half-formulated quality of Rezia's thought processes by clustering the syntax, in the first part of the passage, around the prominent, repeated 'people', which echoes as if internally voiced, and registers the pressure and immediacy of sensory stimuli. The reiterated exclamation 'Help!' could be read as either internally voiced, or as the expression of a desperate unformulated desire. Either way, it is sounded by the reader, escaping from the occlusions of orthodox history, with its narrow definition of evidence, to become an 'event', a happening, a part of the now, affirming, with Benjamin, that 'nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history'.⁴⁷

The appearance of the aeroplane is the cue for an extraordinary sequence of voiced utterances by Rezia, in which she repeats the word 'Look' seven times, five times consecutively (MD 23-29). Her attempts to make Septimus surface from an inner world dominated by sounds and voices suggest the close affinity between the ego and vision, whereby the self frames the world as a separate object of knowledge via the obedient organ of the eye. In contrast to the permanently open, assimilatory orifice of the ear, the selectivity of the eye allows the subject to fix and appropriate objects, to take possession of the visual field and move purposefully through it. It is as though, by directing Septimus to the visible, the spillage between inside and outside can be staunched.

At the same time, these sounded utterances, these repeated instructions to 'look', punctuate a fluid stream of discourse which moves seamlessly amongst different subjects, objects and voices. Thus the quoted and narrated monologues of Rezia merge into an anonymous diegetic passage, and back again to the voice of Rezia, before entering the consciousnesses of Septimus, Maisie Johnson and Mrs. Dempster. Interestingly, the sequence of anonymous narrative considers the 'trouble and suspense of things conglomerated' in the darkness (MD 26), and this

meditation on sightlessness and the status of objects in darkness leads into Rezia's urgent injunctions to 'look'. In both cases, the visual seems to be equated with redemption from chaos, indeterminacy and flux. At the same time, the aeroplane, which is the object of these voices and consciousnesses, with its aerial perspective and visual mastery of the scene, seems to suggest an inaccessible or impossible objectivity, contrasting with these multiple terrestrial viewpoints, which contest the meaning of the aeroplane's celestial writing. Again, different models of history suggest themselves, represented by the remote, detached singularity of the aerial perspective and the plurality of subjective interpretations voiced by the earth-bound witnesses.

The voice in *Mrs. Dalloway* is also explicitly associated with prehistory, embodied in the 'bubbling, burbling' song of the old woman outside Regent's Park Tube Station. The woman's song epitomises the 'simultaneity of prehistory and the present', which Gillian Beer sees as permeating Woolf's fiction.⁴⁸ The utterances of the woman, 'ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo', evoke a primordial scene of 'tusk and mammoth' and 'silent sunrise', when the pavement was 'grass' or 'swamp' (MD 89). Beer argues that Woolf is drawn to what is 'perpetually changing', but this is a constant flux where the perpetuity is as important as the change:

'History is stationary...with all her acute sense of the shifts in material and intellectual circumstances, she figures human beings as unchanging, standing in for each other across the centuries. This sense of the inertness of the human condition means that history is for her playful, a spume of language...the strangeness of the past is all on the surface. At base it is familiar.'⁴⁹

This combination of a sense of the mutability of the material and perceptual world along with a profound timelessness, should also take account, however, of Woolf's

apprehension of the singularity and particularity of the moment. History is at once monolithic and impossibly diverse, inert and deeply unstable, suspended between unity and dispersal in the specificity of the now.

Furthermore, the voice of the old woman, which is 'of no age or sex' (MD 88), also evokes the prehistory of the subject, the 'bubbling, burbling' song suggesting melodic, infantile babble, but also the semiotic or choric phase of the pre-subject, and the pure vocalism of the sonorous envelope. The persistence of the semiotic disposition, once the subject has entered language, is therefore analogous to the inertia and timelessness which Woolf senses at the heart of history itself. The atemporal regime of the chora survives the subject's entry into language, disrupting the symbolic order and subverting 'masculine' chronology, just as prehistory permeates the present. Such a sense of history is not lightly embraced, however. The sequence outside Regent's Park Tube Station also expresses a disgust at the carnality of human origins, a horror of the centrifugal pull of inchoate, primordial beginnings, which are alive in the woman's song, spilling into the present, 'soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages', and streaming away 'in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp stain' (MD 89).

7. Listening to rhetoric

Another significant voice to possess the discourse of *Mrs. Dalloway* is that of narrator as satirist or polemicist, narrator as rhetorician. The object of this satirical, rhetorical voice is the medical profession, and its treatment of mental illness in particular, as manifested in the practices of Sir William Bradshaw. The key rhetorical performance is structured around a double prosopopeia, the personification of 'proportion' and 'conversion' as 'goddesses':

‘Health we must have; and health is proportion; so that when a man comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a message, as they mostly have, and threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months’ rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve. Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William’s goddess...’ (MD 108).

The main rhetorical strategy here is the ironic imitation of the antagonist’s voice, the enactment of a kind of sabotage through ventriloquism. The opening assertive gambit neatly arranges an alliterative, rhythmical symmetry around a caesura, in a balanced formulation which smugly advertises its proportionality. ‘Proportion’ quickly mutates, however, into interruption and dispersal, and then into excess, its antithesis. The reported delusion of the patient, the individual case-study, is disrupted by a series of increasingly dismissive interventions, which qualify the sense of the sentence in a progressively over-zealous, even premature way. Specificity is dispersed into type (‘a common delusion...as they mostly have...as they often do...’). Proportion then becomes exorbitance with the reiteration of the word ‘rest’, which modulates under the pressure of its repetition into a euphemism for incarceration. Medical prescription, therefore, becomes excessive, punitive, carceral sentence, a programme of deprivations and forced feeding, so that the result of the application of proportion is the bizarrely disproportionate bloating of the human body.

‘Proportion’ is thus deconstructed and revealed as merely a screen for the exercise of power, the ‘endlessly repeated play of dominations’, with the effects of this carceral response writing themselves onto the body of the subject, with an uncannily Foucauldian logic. The body in the treatment of ‘madness’ becomes the ‘inscribed surface of events’, and the consultations of Sir William Bradshaw become an *Entstehung*, or emergence of forces, revealing how ‘humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to

'Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion...' (MD 109).

Here proportion has finally become despotism, a psychological tyranny founded on incarceration, eugenics, and propaganda. It is this same sense of 'proportion' which tries to efface the war from national consciousness, affirming with Clarissa Dalloway that 'it was over', a closure confirmed by the restoration of ancient dominations and ineradicable verities, the 'King and Queen at the Palace', Lords, Ascot, the 'stirring of galloping ponies' and the 'tapping of cricket bats' (MD 5), which put the war in 'proportion'. Thus, this rhetoric implicitly suggests, the neurotic or psychotic responses of war veterans like Septimus Smith are, paradoxically, actually proportionate to the trauma of their experiences.

Sir William Bradshaw's other goddess is 'conversion', proportion's 'less smiling, more formidable' sister. In a sustained and self-consciously rhetorical passage, conversion is variously characterized in terms of violent destruction, colonization, consumption, assimilation, attrition and a species of narcissism. This goddess 'offers help, but desires power', she is concerned with 'dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance' (MD 109). Conversion, in other words, describes the oppressive and despotic operations of imperial, patriarchal ideology. A key strategy in the development of this trope is the personalization of the effects of 'conversion' on Sir William's wife, Lady Bradshaw:

'But conversion, fastidious goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts more subtly on the human will. For example, Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his...Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to

minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through...' (MD 110).

Again, 'dominion' is responsible for a very physicalized, implicitly corporeal response, with Lady Bradshaw confining and shaping herself in accordance with her husband's 'craving' for power. Her immersion in, and saturation by, the will of her husband is, as it were, enacted in the verbal density and sonorous momentum of the rhetorical voice, which delivers its insistent oratorical performance with scarcely a pause. Indeed, this is an unusually univocal sequence, continuing for several pages without mimetic interruption or much tonal variation, dramatising the very processes of ideological saturation which are being satirised.

8. Structural polyphony: recurrence, echo, arabesque

In musical terms, an arabesque is an ornate composition made up of intertwining figures. In many ways this is an appropriate description of the intertextuality of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the way in which it weaves different voices and consciousnesses together, and the way in which these voices, or melodies, transect and intersect at dissonant or harmonious chordal moments. Thus, for example, the monologues of Peter Walsh and Rezia Smith converge in the strange dissonances of the old woman's 'ancient song' outside Regent's Park Tube Station. Similarly, there is a clear pattern of interweaving or inosculation between the represented minds of Rezia and Septimus Smith, so that narrator and reader slip easily in and out of their respective consciousnesses. The prime minister's car and the sky-writing aeroplane provide other nodal moments at which objects and subjects, exteriority and interiority interpenetrate, the past converging on the present with startling purpose to produce an uncannily dense historicity, and a model of history as the resurrection of the now.

Clarissa's party is the final such nucleation of subjects, objects and temporalities, weaving together all of the subjectivities and narrative threads of the novel in a grand ensemble of voices, including the Prime Minister, Sally Seton, and Sir William Bradshaw. We eavesdrop on Sir William Bradshaw and Richard Dalloway discussing, in lowered tones, a Bill which is to include some provision for the 'deferred effects of shell shock' (MD 201). Septimus Smith thus finally, and ironically, registers his presence in history only through renouncing any further part in it. He enters the party as an absence, a death, which for Clarissa pervades the gathering as a startling presence, announced like another guest by the deictic indicator and present tense: 'Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought' (MD 201). The violence of his end and the final pulses of his body are seen and heard in Clarissa's imagination, rather than at the scene of his death, one last repudiation of history as linear sequence:

'He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness' (MD 201-2).

Septimus' final heart-beats resound in Clarissa's ears in a belated moment of empathy, enacting a miniaturised version of the way the novel resurrects its history for the reader.

This anastomosis, or cross-connection of voices and narrative strands, is not the limit of the novel's rhythmical and aural patterning, however. Systematic intertextuality is overlain with a further pattern of recurrences and echoes, which are linked to different orders of temporality. Thus the chimes of Big Ben and St. Margaret's, two types of public time, resonate against the repetition of 'Fear no more, says the heart', which connotes biological or subjective time, the dual pattern shaping and structuring the arabesque form of the novel, as well as establishing its

inclusive historicity.

Moments of being are also part of this rhythm of echo, recurrence and resemblance. The intense experiences of presence and memory which punctuate the represented consciousnesses of Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith and Peter Walsh echo each other and call to each other, defying the contingencies of history and affirming the community of being human. They weave a pattern of tonal and semantic thickenings or nucleations across the spaces and textures of the novel, helping to shape the dialogue between remembering and forgetting, past and present, history and being, and revealing, in their repetition, the paradox of being-in-history.

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The Waves : epistemologies of the ear

1. Silent voices: narrative structure

Amongst other things, *The Waves* concerns itself with different ways of being and knowing, with multiple and intersecting epistemologies, expressed as voices and addressed to the ear of an other. This plurality of voices suggests the fragmentation of the monocular patriarchal perspective and a synthesis of marginalised histories, hitherto unwritten subjective histories excluded from conventional linear historiography which exist outside the frame of the 'masterful' masculine gaze. These are histories heard inside heads and lost to History. *The Waves* is history in defiance of History, a history of silence and stasis and intuition.

The novel is composed of seven voices, those of the six characters, and that of the anonymous, extradiegetic narrator, which supplies the unchanging speech marker, 'said', and (presumably) the italicized interludes. Each of the named voices is stylistically differentiated, given an idiolectal distinctiveness and integrity, yet none of them could be thought of as speaking aloud, as uttering their monologues.

These voices, then, cannot easily be situated within the theoretical frameworks, categories and sub-categories of narratology. They may be subtly differentiated, but they are not strictly speaking mimetic, since their discourses are neither direct nor indirect speech or thought, and belong entirely neither to interiority or to exteriority. But nor are they a species of diegesis, since they are so unmistakably designated as belonging to specific characters, and so clearly distinct from the impersonal, extradiegetic narrator. Furthermore, the discourses of *The Waves* present a sustained challenge to focalization, not only because they elude definitive identification as word or thought, but because they are so difficult to situate in terms of space and time. We cannot for long lodge ourselves in the

interior spaces of the characters' minds or bodies, since we are constantly ejected by the speech indicator, which insists on our exteriority. On the other hand, nor can we calmly listen, from the outside, to the voices as utterances, since there is no real sense of corporeal solidity or exteriority, no sense of a containing skin outside of which we can make a stand. For the same reason, when the narrative voices direct us to the visible, objective world, to the outside, we can only focalize on that in a tentative, uneasy way, constantly drawn back, as we are, by the inescapable interiority of the monologues. Each of the spaces we attempt to occupy collapses in on itself, casting us adrift in the sonorous flux and rhythm of language.

Similarly, there is little sense of diurnal time, historical context, or geographical specificity to latch on to. The novel is temporally sequential, but the passage of time is not articulated by 'events', in the conventional sense. There is no explicit social interaction, there are no polarizations of opinion or personality, no accumulations of tension, or climaxes of plot, and pace is only really modulated by the varying lengths of the monologues. The fundamental fluidity of the text is thus offset by a profound sense of stasis. The movements and operations of memory, perception, sensation, are afflicted by an underlying immobility, an over-riding stillness beyond these shifting surfaces. The characters, furthermore, are radically abstracted from their own biographies, so that we learn little of their occupations and virtually nothing of their familial or social relations, other than those pertaining to their shared collectivity. Their consciousnesses change with the passage of time, but continue to orbit ordinary events, and are held by a form of being and expression which is unchanging.

More disconcerting still, though, we soon realize that these voices are not the voices of the characters at all, since any such voices would have no reason to pronounce in this way. Instead we are accomplices in a pretence of inward

speech, orchestrated by a profoundly anonymous narrator, who is at the same time omnipresent and all-penetrating, who permeates the text in a comprehensive but intangible and elusive way. This narrator speaks on behalf of an interiority which would or could never speak for itself, or to itself, in such a manner. In a sense, then, the novel enacts a violation or travesty of interiority, with the narrator dragging inarticulate 'sensation, perception, intellect, memory, imagination' ¹ (Laurence 202) into the realm of fully formed language, into fixed and crafted writing, without the various represented consciousnesses, so to speak, being aware of that narrator's presence, without the illusion of their sanction. Such a narrator is stealthily intradiegetic, imperceptibly ventriloquial, an all-pervading, saturating absence invoking the paradoxes of presence. Indeed, the experimental narrative structures described here are at least partly designed to allow for an engagement with the problematics of presence and temporality.

2. Derrida, *The Waves* , and the problem of presence

Derrida's systematic deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence and what he sees as the fallacies of phenomenology would seem to be relevant to *The Waves* on a number of levels. Woolf's sense of a perpetually receding present, of the anteriority or belatedness of being and the enigmatic elusiveness of full presence, as well as the status of the inward voice, similarly preoccupies Derrida in 'Speech and Phenomena' (and elsewhere).² The essay is a deconstruction of the first of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* , 'Expression and Meaning', which argues that presence is suggested in a privileged way by the speaker hearing his / her own voice, so that the voice acquires a 'transcendent dignity' (20) with regard to presence. Husserl also asserts, in Derrida's words, that a 'purely expressive and noncommunicative discourse can effectively take place in "solitary mental life" (15). Derrida counters this by arguing that, insofar as presence is suggested by the

speaker hearing his own voice, aurality 'could be as much a source of deception as sight' (Jay 501),³ since the supposition that the speaking subject hears himself in the present fails to take fully into account the nature and structure of signs. The fact that signs work on the basis of difference and deferral, 'differance', means that they are 'foreign to the self-presence of the living present' and 'foreign to presence in general' (Derrida 18).

The Waves could be thought of as an exploration of the foreignness of the sign to presence and self-presence, an attempt to close the gap between presence and the sign. Certainly the language of the novel is put to a kind of aberrant purpose, occupying territory that is foreign to it, sounding aspects of being which are alien to speaking and writing, foreign to the sign. Rhythm and affect, the semiotic materiality of language, work to destabilize and unbalance its symbolic function. In this sense, the novel exists as a kind of superfluity, an exorbitant and systematically self-sabotaging aberration, the result of attempting to make presence present to itself in language, where language inevitably works against this purpose. This paradox is partly resolved, or at least articulated, in Derrida's essay, by invoking the concept of the 'trace':

'The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace. This trace cannot be thought out on the basis of a simple present whose life would be within itself; the self of the living present is primordially a trace.' (Derrida 26)

This formulation has a strong resonance for *The Waves*. The 'living present' evoked by the voices, and instantly consigned to the past and to memory by the speech indicator, seems to register as 'always already a trace' of that present. The 'speaking' selves of the novel provide only retentional traces of themselves, which in turn recall other, earlier, primordial traces of other, earlier selves. Selfhood itself,

discloses its belatedness, plurality and ephemerality.

The argument that Derrida rehearses, Husserl's argument, is by no means entirely refuted by its deconstruction, however. Despite his suspicion of the privileging of speech over writing, and his affirmation of the exteriority of the sign to presence and intention, Derrida's account of the 'phenomenological power' of the voice, which is conceived as part of a step by step reduction of Husserl's thesis, betrays a kind of fascination with the dubious 'transcendent dignity' of that voice. Certainly the argument is rehearsed with some relish:

'My words are alive' because they seem not to leave me: not to fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance; not to cease to belong to me, to be at my disposition...' (Derrida 19).

That the transcendence of the voice is only 'apparent' turns out to be of only marginal historical significance anyway, since this 'appearance' is the 'very essence of consciousness and its history', and any attempt at its deconstruction moves towards the 'unnameable', foundering on an aporia. Despite the contention that no 'objective' science can 'teach us anything about the essence of the voice', Derrida appears to acknowledge the centrality of the voice to consciousness, even given that the 'possibility of writing' dwells within speech, which in turn is 'at work in the inwardness of thought' (Derrida 24).

If Derrida is suspicious about the effect of hearing one's own voice as a justification for speech's alleged preeminence over writing, however, he also stresses the importance of the 'ear of the other' as a disruption of presence, affirming enigmatically that it is 'the ear of the other that signs'.⁴ Relating this to *The Waves* there is a sense in which the anonymous, pervasive narrator lends an ear to the voices of the characters, becoming the 'ear of the other' and in a quite literal sense

translating the 'unsounded' voices into signs. The reader too supplies an ear 'that signs', repeating 'in himself the hearing-oneself-speak' in the 'very form' in which it is produced ('Speech and Phenomena' 23). Hearing these voices speak, the reader hears himself speak, encountering not 'the interiority of an inside that is closed in upon itself', but the 'irreducible openness in the inside', 'the eye and the world within speech' (Derrida 27). The absent narrator and the reader collaborate, so to speak, in disrupting the presence desired, but never quite achieved, by the voices. The presence towards which everything gravitates remains forever just out of reach, like some textualization of Zeno's Paradox, thwarted by 'difference'.

Elsewhere, notably in 'Tympan', Derrida is preoccupied with the physical configuration of the ear, its labyrinthine structure, which introduces delay and distancing, and problematizes the 'distinction between inner and outer, producing a sensation of uncanniness' (Jay 514). The voices in Woolf's novel similarly dissolve the boundary between inside and outside, while delay is suggested by the past tense speech indicator, and also by the profusion of performative utterances ('I sink down on the black plumes of sleep,' 23), which distance the speaker from his / her actions, introducing fractional but significant delay, and destabilizing the temporal context of those actions.

It is also illuminating to consider *The Waves* in the light of some of Sartre's ideas about presence and subjectivity, as expressed in *Being and Nothingness* and *Nausea*.⁵ The very existence of such voices as those out of which the novel is composed would normally seem to presuppose what Sartre calls 'presence to self', and yet, as has already been suggested, the monologues are generally oblivious to their own production. Self-conscious or not, though, 'presence to self' is inherent in the very structures of the narrative, a 'presence to self', Sartre argues, which 'supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being', a 'deterioration of

coincidence' through which the 'nothingness of being' is glimpsed (Sartre 77-78). This nothingness is a consequence, Sartre suggests, of being's 'presence to itself', a 'decompression of being'. In these terms, then, the 'presence to self' of being, which permeates *The Waves*, of which it is, in fact, almost exclusively composed, enacts a sustained 'decompression of being', disclosing the nothingness which results from 'the putting into question of being by being'. In Sartre's terms, *The Waves* is a 'nihilating act' (79) on a grand scale, a monstrous negativity which empties the reader, hollowing out consciousness and filling the vacant space with inchoate rhythms and pulsations. There are, of course, other ways of thinking about this, some of which will be explored later in this chapter, but, for the moment, *Being and Nothingness* can also be linked to Woolf's novel in terms of what Martin Jay calls its 'antiocularcentrism'.

3. The repudiation of the eye

Virginia Woolf called *The Waves* an 'abstract...eyeless book',⁶ and certainly the experience of reading the novel would seem to challenge the eye in a number of amorphous and unsettling ways. For a start, the visual is almost exclusively contained inside the quasi-vocal, folding catastrophically in on itself in a collapse of narrative space each time a specular position is opened up. Whatever is made visible by the different voices is infected by their ephemerality, their inherent impermanence, so that no matter how vibrant or concrete the visual image, it is inevitably dissolved or dispersed by the remorseless speech indicator, 'said'. Furthermore, the invariable past tense foregrounds the irrecoverability of the voice, its posteriority, so that the reader is in constant pursuit of the thought or utterance of the character, clutching at nothing but traces of their presence, which are, nevertheless, oddly persistent. We are forced, therefore, to discriminate between the visible and the retrospectively visualizable. We visualize what we know is no

longer visible, drawn into uneasy awareness of the artificiality of the reconstructive imaginative processes involved. The visible fades and decays and the inner eye of the reader is subject to perpetual loss, to a continual darkening:

‘The leaves are gathered round the window like pointed ears,’ said Susan.
‘A shadow falls on the path,’ said Louis, ‘like an elbow bent.’
‘Islands of light are swimming on the grass,’ said Rhoda. ‘They have fallen through the trees.’
‘The birds’ eyes are bright in the tunnels between the leaves,’ said Neville.’
(7)

The effect of loss and inaccessibility is intensified here by the separateness and singularity of the images framed. The compositions cannot long be held by the eye, while the present tense, paradoxically, evokes a pastness, a loss of presence, which is all the more poignant for having just gone.

As the characters grow and their monologues lengthen, the ‘eyelessness’ alluded to by Woolf continues to manifest itself. Their vision is intermittent and broken, their discourse registers dislocated, intensely vivid fragments of the visible world, but these fragments never cohere into what Jay calls the ‘Cartesian, perspectivalist scopic’ gaze, which is the essence of Enlightenment rationality. There is very little long-distance visual surveillance of the object world in *The Waves*, only a kind of occluded and fractured tunnel vision, which focuses in microscopic, fragmented close-up on details, constituent parts of objects and bodies, localised effects of light and movement. Even when surveillance is the stated objective of the character, the ‘masterful’ gaze cannot be sustained:

‘...I will continue to make my survey of the purlieus of the house in the late afternoon, in the sunset, when the sun makes oleaginous spots on the linoleum, and a crack of light kneels on the wall, making the chair legs look broken.’ (20)

The gaze is distracted by the local and the particular, drawn to ephemeral effects of light, or optical distortion, while the material fabric of the house, the solidity of the object world, dissolves into the haziness of mere background, becoming putative and theoretical. The eye flickers and moves, blinking and closing to the outside, rather than mastering a perspective or a view.

More frequently, the different voices invoke the visual through a combination of deictic indicators and imperatives to 'look', so that the gaze, or looking, becomes a self-conscious, deliberate act, willed rather than automatic, linking the eye with an exercise of power which is intermittent. Often when the eye is invoked in this way, observation of the outside world quickly transmutes into inner vision, fusing with the tactile and the aural, to be seduced by the melody and rhythms of language:

'Now from the window of the tram I see masts among chimneys; there is the river; there are ships that sail to India. I will walk by the river. I will pace this embankment, where an old man reads a newspaper in a glass shelter. I will pace this terrace and watch the ships bowling down the tide. A woman walks on deck, with a dog barking round her. Her skirts are blown; her hair is blown; they are going out to sea; they are leaving us; they are vanishing this summer evening.' (140)

Here, the performative is succeeded by the demonstrative, followed by the repeated future tense or auxiliary verb, and then a series of hypnotic repetitions, enacting a progressive retreat from presence and from the present, so that the pattern of fading movement and slow dissolution of the last section of the passage seems to take place outside of linear time and history. 'Summer evening' relates to cyclical, repetitive time, defying the specificity of the demonstrative pronoun. Once again, the eye is unable to fix the scene, which disperses into movement and a narcotic syntax of silences and echoes.

Of all the ocular discourses in the novel, the narrated interludes most closely

conform to Martin Jay's 'perspectivalist, scopic regime', but even here the hegemony of the visual is subverted or distorted, and the 'ocularcentric tradition's equation of the "I" and the "eye"' breaks down (Jay 284). The "I" is scrupulously detached from the eye, effaced from the equation. Instead, these passages trace the specular activity of an other's eye, an inhuman eye, the eye as source of light, so that the sun becomes the all-seeing eye of the Other, creating objects, giving 'everything its exact measure of colour' (126) and texture. Sometimes it adopts a masterful aerial perspective, beating on the 'crowded pinnacles of southern hills' and catching 'steamers thudding over the sea' in its 'level stare' (126-7). More often it strikes the waves, the sea-shore, the exterior and interior of the house, and the activity of birds in the garden, microscopic in its penetration, reaching into the 'formidable corners and lines of cabinets and bookcases', picking out the 'atoms of grey-blue air'. On these occasions, the eye of the inhuman Other seems fixed, unblinking and remorseless in its penetrating gaze, as stationary as a time-delay camera, creating a specular world emptied of human presence.

The uncompromising lucidity of this gaze is in contrast to the nature of the vision of the characters, where the presence of the self-reflecting ego 'congeals consciousness' and 'darkens it', introducing the 'germ of opaqueness' into the 'spontaneity' of being.⁷ This darkening and coagulation occurs despite the fact that the consciousnesses of the characters are often represented without the implication of their own volition and awareness. That the all-pervading narrator intrudes into spaces which are private even from the monologuists themselves does not shed light into these spaces. Rather, the visual opaqueness noted by Sartre persists. Instead, the various consciousnesses are experienced in a way that is predominantly rhythmical, through the ear rather than the eye, intensifying the sense of ephemerality and the elusiveness of presence.

In *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay traces the systematic 'denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought', characterizing the work of Sartre as the apotheosis of antiocularcentrism, from which much subsequent philosophical hostility to the gaze in French thought is descended, to one degree or another. Thus Foucault's profound suspicion of the gaze, and his sense of its institutionalized connection to power, can be related to Sartre's conception of the subject as 'the victim of the look' of others (Jay 287). Similarly, French feminist discourse shares this distrust of the eye, implicating the ocular in phallogocentrism. Helene Cixous, for instance, has remarked that she always privileges the 'ear over the eye', while Luce Irigaray notes that the eye 'objectifies and masters' more than any other sense, explaining the 'impoverishment of bodily relations' which she detects in patriarchal culture in terms of the 'predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing'.⁸ Kristeva focuses on the role of the maternal voice in the constitution of the subject, privileging the vocal over the visual, while semiotics itself is substantially a listening practice. The semiotic disposition is invoked, through the ear, by the suprasegmental, by melody, pulsions and silences within language. Kristeva's work draws to some extent on Lacan, who similarly locates the formation of the subject at its point of entry into the symbolic code, so that, crudely speaking, language thwarts the specular identity promised by the 'mirror stage'. Derrida, of course, is preoccupied with language, and in particular writing, seeing vision as a 'textual construct' rather than a perceptual experience. Indeed Allan Megill argues that in Derrida 'one finds an anti-ocular, antispacial stance so radical that all positions seem to be wiped away as soon as they become visible.'⁹

One of the problems with such a traditional, linear synopsis of feminist and post-structuralist theory is that it is beholden to the very Enlightenment traditions which writers such as Kristeva and Derrida have done so much to repudiate and deconstruct, drawing upon notions such as nationality and influence as if they were

mysteriously de-problematized by the anti-ocularcentric premise of Jay's book. Kristeva's theories of the semiotic, for example, universalize an atemporality which is inconsistent with a chronological approach, eluding orthodox History in a way which is far more radical than Jay's thesis allows. Kristeva shares with Woolf a more ambiguous relationship to linear, 'concrete', material History, a relationship more in tune with the relativities of postmodernism, and post-structuralist conceptions of language.

Although Jay's argument is so broad as to be almost all-inclusive, the foregoing synopsis nevertheless throws up some interesting points of contact with Woolf. Consciousness in *The Waves* is represented as constant flux, predicated (like Derrida's conception of language) on perpetual motion, so that no 'point of view' (except, perhaps, that of the interludes) is held long enough to become a position. Visual perceptions merge into sounds or memories, the specular present modulates into the speculative future or the atemporality of the imagination, fragments of the visible world prompt reflections on the subject's status within it. Identity coheres around repeated phrases, rather than through sustained visual engagement with the world, around verbal motifs, idiolectal gestures, and characteristic intonational patterns (recalling Kristeva's 'semiotic disposition'), which form the ontological core of the characters. The 'I' becomes associated with the ear, rather than the eye.

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, like Woolf's novel, finds vision 'insufficient as a means to conceive the subject', or the 'for-itself', and equally 'problematic in its attempts to conceptualize the object', or the 'in-itself' (Jay 286). As Jay points out, the troubled relationship between being and the eye is more dramatically rendered by Sartre in *Nausea*, which shares some of the epiphanic sensuality of *The Waves*, and a similarly problematic relationship with empirical reality. In Woolf's

novel, however, the abjection of revelatory moments of being is more often tinged with the sublime than in *Nausea*, where Roquentin typically encounters matter, or the 'in-itself', as superfluous, absurd and obscene. Thus Bernard can talk of 'those sudden transparencies through which one sees everything' (206), while Roquentin is faced with 'soft, monstrous masses, in disorder - naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness', once the 'veneer' of 'abstract category', or language, has 'melted' from the surface of objects (*Nausea* 183). Elsewhere, however, Bernard seems to share Roquentin's sense of separation and superfluity, conceiving of individuals as existing 'not only separately but in undifferentiated blobs of matter' (211).

Whereas Roquentin's discourse, however, never really moves beyond the sense of an impasse between being and language, remaining trapped in an objective, pseudo-scientific register, Woolf's novel mobilises the semiotic resources of language, communicating on a subliminal level, orchestrating rhythms, aural patterns and echoes to render the paradoxes of being and presence. Despite their differences in approach, then, *The Waves* and *Nausea* can both be read as antiocularcentric, as explorations of the limitations of the eye as the organising principle of consciousness. As such, they are part of the wider 'crisis of visual primacy' (Jay 212), which emerged in Europe between the wars (finding expression, for instance in non-mimetic visual art movements like Cubism and Surrealism), and the collapse of notions of a shared, monocular perspective, and an unproblematic, dispassionate gaze.

4. Paradigms of knowledge

Each of the characters in *The Waves* represents a different kind of subjectivity, a different psychological type, each of which in turn suggests a different paradigm of

knowing and being in the world, a distinctive, self-validating epistemological model. If *The Waves* is an alternative, non-linear history, challenging the mastery of the masculine gaze, the unity of the subject, and the authority of the author, then it also contains a plurality of historical models.

Bernard is a 'maker of phrases', a story-teller enslaved by sequences, troubled by the proliferation of his own discourses and the decentred relativity which this implies. For Bernard, 'to speak of knowledge is futile' (100). Susan is 'glutted with natural happiness' (148), oriented by 'love and hate', and knows the world in terms of the maternal, the cyclical, the rhythms of the days and seasons, and of the body. Jinny too knows the world through the body, seeing 'things in outline', with 'the body's imagination', but in a very different way from Susan. Jinny's corporeality is founded on desire and movement, she knows life as an erotic dance. Rhoda, on the other hand, is faceless and decorporealized, ontologically dispersed, knowing life primarily as discontinuity, where 'one moment does not lead to another' (111). Hers is a system of knowledge with its roots in the unconscious, non-sequential, anti-teleological, an epistemology of abjection and psychosis. Neville stands for enlightenment rationality, but a rationality which is informed by an 'epistemology of the closet', and the ramifications of the open secret of his homosexuality. Finally, Louis sees himself as a residue of history, the product of 'a vast inheritance of experience' (142), whose 'destiny' is that he 'remembers' and must 'weave together' the 'many threads' of history in the capitalist market-place of the present (173).

All of these epistemologies are expressed in ways which are primarily aural, rather than visual, vocal (or semiotic) as well as verbal (or symbolic), and each of them, in turn, suggests a different way of listening to history, and feeling the passage and stasis of time. The final gathering of the characters at Hampton Court, for example,

is punctuated by numerous injunctions to 'listen' and to 'hear', and there is an oscillation between silences and sounds, and between different conceptions of time and history:

'Drop upon drop,' said Bernard, 'silence falls. It forms on the roof of the mind and falls into pools beneath. Forever alone, alone, alone, - hear silence fall and sweep its rings to the furthest edges.' (192)

Typically, the visual image is complemented and completed by the sonorities of phonemic patterning and repetition. The picture formed in the mind's eye is animated through the ear to the level of an enactment, and the syllables resonate after the mental image fades. Imaginative space is constructed out of rhythms and silences, out of the reverberations of the voice, the intonational curve of the phrases, and the patterns of assonance and echo. Bernard's 'utterance' becomes part of a silent dialogue with Louis, who also enjoins us to listen:

'But listen,' said Louis, 'to the world moving through abysses of infinite space. It roars; the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilization; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness.' (193)

Louis invokes the end of history, or history as apocalypse, in terms which reflect the crisis of visual primacy and the disenchantment of the eye discussed earlier. Enlightenment is literally repudiated in the extinction of light, lost in 'abysses' of 'darkness'. Bernard, replying, again entreats us to listen:

'Silence falls; silence falls,' said Bernard. 'But now listen; tick, tick; hoot, hoot; the world has hailed us back to it. I heard for one moment the howling winds of darkness as we passed beyond life. Then tick, tick (the clock); then hoot, hoot (the cars).' (193)

The abyssal moment of silence is ended by the inhumanity of time and the machine, by the mechanical organisation of experience, expressed in sound.

Again, characteristically, presence, or the 'now', is invoked through the use of onomatopoeia, reverberating into the spaces and pauses in the syntax, dissolving before it can be siezed. The theme is picked up by Rhoda, who asks us to 'listen to the trams squealing and to the flashes from the electric rails' and the sounds of the trees raising their branches (198).

Each of the paradigms of knowledge represented by the characters, then, is arrived at by listening, filtered, as it were, through the labyrinth of the ear. Taken together, they foreshadow some of the defining features of postmodernity, notably its plurality and relativity, its suspicion of grand narratives (the single 'story' which eludes Bernard), its scepticism about 'classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity',¹⁰ its radical interrogation of language, and the anti-ocularcentrism which Martin Jay traces as a distinctive feature of postmodernity and post-structuralism generally. At the same time, *The Waves* exhibits a decidedly modernist faith in the power of extreme and experimental forms of expression to capture and represent this fragmentation of experience. It reveals and attempts to fill the psychic emptiness which is a function of modernity's dissociation of language from meaning, a dissociation which is acknowledged, expressed and resisted in modernism, but embraced with ironic fatalism by postmodernism. Woolf's fiction, and *The Waves* in particular, enacts this moment of collision between the absolutism of the modernist enterprise and the inevitability of failure, recording and orchestrating the modulation from modernity to postmodernity.

Collectively, then, the whole effect of the monologues is to create a sense of rhythm and movement which is greater than the sum of the individual voices, a sense of a subterranean, subjective, and essentially timeless history pulsing beneath orthodox History's catalogue of events and chronological sequences. In its attempts to give form to relativised, fragmenting and proliferating epistemological

models, therefore, the novel stands at the cusp of modernity and postmodernity, and offers a model of historiography which takes account of contradiction, difference and interiority, and records what it feels like to live inside, and be devoured by, History.

4.1. Bernard: knowledge as sequence

Bernard, 'born...knowing that one word follows another', is trapped in consecutive phrases and sentences, 'finding sequences everywhere' (113). In this respect he shares the problem of the historiographer, who must make sense of sequences of events, extrapolating the general from the particular. He is in pursuit of 'the one story' to which all of his collected phrases refer, and as such his subjecthood, or consciousness, is structured like a language, moving restlessly from one signification to another, his identity constantly dissolving and recomposing itself, decentred and indeterminate, like the 'sliding' of the signifier over the signified. His mind 'hums hither and thither with its veil of words for everything', but is thwarted by the constant deferral of meaning inherent in language. 'There is no stability in this world', he reflects, 'Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word?' (100). For Bernard, knowledge is structured in sequences, but sequences whose direction cannot be entirely predicted or controlled, and which merely lead to yet more sequences. He inhabits an unstable, post-structuralist universe, made of indeterminacies and relative truths, of sliding signifiers, shedding his 'life-skins' as he moves through the world (161).

If Bernard is trapped in sequences, in a continuum of consecutive phrases and events where meaning is indeterminate or postponed, he also comes to realize that this purposeless continuity, this constant movement through chronological time, sustains the human subject, preventing the dispersal of identity:

'Listen. There is a sound like the knocking of railway trucks in a siding. That

is the happy concatenation of one event following another in our lives. Knock, knock, knock. Must, must, must. Must go, must sleep, must wake, must get up - sober, merciful word which we pretend to revile, which we press tight to our hearts, without which we should be undone. How we worship that sound like the knocking together of trucks in a siding!' (201)

Sound, here, epitomises temporal sequence and social organisation, once again enacting that sequence in a series of onomatopoeia and repetitions, performing the monotony and banality of linear events as they are described, regulating chaotic experience with rhythm.

Bernard's summing up coincides with his eventual repudiation of stories, 'stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on', his realisation that 'none of them are true' (204), that *jouissance* cannot be fixed in sequences of phrases, that affect has deserted narrative. His weariness with stories and phrases is a final admission that language will not deliver the coherence or unity of meaning which he seeks. Instead, he begins to 'long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement' (204). He articulates the futility of 'painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan' (215). Nevertheless, the summing up is an attempt to extrapolate, through repetition and 'comment in the margin' (205), the meanings concealed in all these phrases and stories. By reprising stories already told in the different monologues Bernard challenges and undermines the linear sequentiality in which he is trapped, affirming a self-referential simultaneity whereby 'all these things happen in one second and last forever' (205), a temporality which is at once static and fluid. Bernard's appeal to the non-verbal, or the pre-verbal, his repudiation of sequential stories and consecutive phrases, invokes an epistemological model which resembles Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic. Kristeva's theories imply a historicism which valorizes 'meanings which lie adjacent to official stories, those

traces of an unconscious, prior to sexual differentiation, which physically transgress in rhythm and impulse the strict demarcations of standard uses of language'.¹¹ Similarly, Bernard knows that the truth of his stories lies out of the reach of 'false phrases', even those 'resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making wild music' (254). Instead, he needs 'words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into a room and find their mother sewing'. He needs a 'howl; a cry', concluding that silence is 'better' than phrases, aligning himself with the maternal voice rather than the paternal word, with 'knots of desire' and the drives 'latent in the phonic invocation or in the gesture of writing' (Kristeva 'Talking about Polylogue', *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, extract in *Feminist Literary Theory*, p.303).¹² In this sense, his pursuit of the one 'true' story is a quest for an originary source, for the unity of the semiotic chora, the sonorous space that precedes language and the subject's separation from the real by the symbolic code.

Bernard's is also the voice which meditates and pronounces most extensively on time and memory. He recognises the moment when his youth is lost, the moment when time ceases to be a 'dancing light', 'becomes pendant', 'tapers to a point' and falls. During the final collective sequence at Hampton Court, he reflects on lives streaming away, 'down the unlighted avenues, past the strip of time, unidentified' (195). He also recognises, amidst all of this impermanence, the timelessness and value of moments of being, moments of sublime intersubjectivity, which add to the 'treasury of moments' (125):

'...we...for one moment out of what measureless abundance of past time and time to come, burnt there triumphant. The moment was all; the moment was enough.' (239)

Bernard's summing up relives some of the treasured moments, refracting them

through memory, and resurrecting them through the senses. Julia Kristeva's comment about Proust, that he 'gives an X-ray image of memory, bringing to light its painful yet rapturous dependence on the senses',¹³ is equally applicable to Bernard's final extended monologue. His reiteration of events is part, too, of a wider pattern of repetition in the novel, repetition made up of the rhythms of the monologues, which pulse in rising and falling wave patterns, repetition of phrases, gestures and attitudinal postures, of gaps and silences, and of collective memories.

Repetition for Woolf is an encounter with difference as much as with similarity or mimesis. She is preoccupied with perpetual change as well as a peculiar inertia at the heart of the human condition, the singularity of the moment in the continuum of other moments. She is concerned with the flux of history as well as the persistence of the primordial, the ever widening orbit of the subject as well as the lure of origins. But *The Waves* is not really about a 'search for lost times', or adding to the treasury of radiant moments, as much as the very processes of *feeling* time, of losing, consuming and being consumed by it. The rhythm of dissolution and recomposition, loss and salvage, our sense of the logic of what Kristeva calls 'felt time' (Proust 7) working against the logic of chronological time, is tied to a pattern of inexorable decay within the rising and falling rhythm, a winding down of lives. In this sense, each repetition is a dilution of being, or a further separation from the source, an extra ring on the tree.

Bernard's mode of knowing the world, therefore, pushes story-telling or orthodox historiography to its logical limits, coming up, finally, against the indeterminacies of language and the inherent fictionality and imprecision of all narratives. Ultimately he is unable to abandon representation for the 'cry' or the 'bark', unable, even 'without a self', finally to leave behind the rational ego and the insistence of the ocularcentric, Cartesian 'I, I, I.' He embraces the 'incessant rise and fall, and fall

and rise again' (255), the cyclical rhythm of extinction and renewal, but remains enslaved by narratives and sequences of phrases, albeit phrases impregnated with such emotion, so patently charged with the latent, and arranged in such ways, that they abolish the neutral status of the signifier and expose the fundamental poverty of language, creating a breathless vacuum as the novel closes.

4.2. Susan: an epistemology of motherhood

Susan knows the world through the 'bestial and beautiful passion of maternity' (113), embodying an enigmatic epistemology based on motherhood, generation and regeneration, rustic or pastoral domesticity, the rhythms of the body, the seasons, of waking and sleeping. The dominant mood of her monologues is what Kristeva describes as an 'inaccessible peace colored with melancholy', suggesting a displacement of the self, a 'shattering, a loss of identity, a sweet jubilation where *she* is not' (Kristeva).¹⁴

From the beginning of the novel, she is associated with primordial emotions and natural fecundity, with 'love and hate' and monolithic desire. She imagines herself 'close to the ground' (11), anchored to the earth and entangled in its organic productivity. Of all the characters' monologues, Woolf makes Susan's the least self-consciously composed, exhibiting the 'striking lack of interest' in the 'architectonics of the word' (303) which Kristeva (provocatively, and later in her career) associates with all women's writing. Susan is 'tied down with single words' (12), but luxuriates in her monosyllabic inarticulacy, embraces the 'speech of non-being' (303), becomes 'glutted with natural happiness', eventually gaping 'like a young bird, unsatisfied, for something that has escaped' her (200). Her epistemology is based on 'hereditary pattern', 'life in blocks, substantial, huge' (184). It is centred on territories contested and secured, those of the body, the

house, the garden, and the chora which she weaves around her children with her own voice. Her territoriality in the last of these is predicated on the creation of 'silent', vocal space around the sleeping baby, a 'conspiracy of hush', as Woolf calls it in *Jacob's Room* :

'Sleep, sleep, I croon, whether it is summer or winter, May or November. Sleep, I sing - I, who am unmelodious and hear no music save rustic music when a dog barks, a bell tinkles, or wheels crunch upon the gravel. I sing my song like an old shell murmuring on the beach. Sleep, sleep, I say, warning off with my voice all who rattle milk-cans, fire at rooks, shoot rabbits, or in any way bring the shock of destruction near this whicker cradle, laden with soft limbs, curled under a pink coverlet' (W 146-8).

This particular monologue, with its hypnotic, repetitive injunctions, its rhythmical 'sequence of linked instants' (Kristeva 286),¹⁵ recreates the maternal voice in action, spinning its 'fine thread round the cradle' and wrapping the infant in a vocal 'cocoon', the mother's desire maintaining the 'newborn child within the invocation' of her own voice (Kristeva 282). The chora also constitutes a protective barrier here, embracing 'rustic music', but repulsing the violent alterity of man-made sound. The mother's voice is explicitly related to the sound of the sea, preserved in the shell, which becomes a neat symbol of the semiotic disposition itself. The receptacle of the shell reproduces the simultaneous remoteness and persistence of the oceanic or maternal voice, preserving the forgotten musicality of the sonorous envelope.

Susan's monologues also express the paradox that mothers (and women in general for that matter) are excluded from the History of which they are the source. She becomes 'glutted with natural happiness', and sometimes wishes that the 'fullness would pass' and the 'weight of the sleeping house rise' (148). She hears the 'traffic in the brush of the wind down the lane, and broken voices, and laughter', the aural traces of the society from which motherhood has banished her, yet which

have their origins, along with conceptions of spatiality and temporality, in the 'laughter-space' (Kristeva 285) created by the maternal voice. The broken voices and 'laughter' of society commemorate this sonorous space and yet attempt to efface the mother from that society's History. Susan's maternal epistemology shares some of the cruces and paradoxes of Julia Kristeva's pronouncements about motherhood and the formation of the human subject, as outlined in the opening chapter.

Relating all of this to the monologues of Susan in *The Waves*, it would appear that Woolf similarly recognizes the paradoxes of maternity within a patriarchal system, the way that the mother is excluded from society at the same time as she is immunised from its seductions. She is imprisoned by her very liberation from the paternal word, penalised for her generative creativity and indispensability, and ostracized from the sociability of which she is the originary author. Susan is 'fenced in' by her own productivity, confined to the spaces which she has secured, 'planted' like one of her own trees (163). Her very rootedness, though, separates her from the 'waves' of her life which toss and break around her, so that her life stands around her 'like glass round the imprisoned reed' (164), an apposite metaphor for the invisible receptacle of the semiotic chora. Her territories have been secured at the cost of immobility and the renunciation of words and phrases, so that when the six characters gather at Hampton Court she quenches the 'silver-grey flickering moth-wing quiver of words with the green spurt of (her) clear eyes' (184). Consonantal chatter in this phrase is extinguished by long primordial vowels in an aural enactment of Susan's primal, non-verbal epistemology.

Whereas Bernard's life fragments into a multiplicity of stories, Susan's is written on her body, in the 'gradations of healthy colour on the knuckles' of her hands. Her body 'has been used daily, rightly, like a tool by a good workman, all over. The

blade is clean, sharp, worn in the centre' (184). She embodies Bernard's realisation of 'how much better is silence' than the chatter of phrases. By definition, she is written out of History, but hers is the deafening silence which the chatter of masculine, sequential historiography fears and seeks to fill.

4.3 Neville: open secrets, secret subjects, secret histories

Woolf's representation of the character of Neville (and to a lesser extent, each of the other characters in the novel) anticipates and intuits many of the features of postmodern theorizations of gender and sexuality, interrogating rigid definitions of sexual identity, and the binarisms which underpin heterosexist culture. The eroticization and mythologization of Percival in the novel, for example, is not confined to the most explicitly homosexual character, Neville, and the representation of sexuality generally is not predicated purely on gender or sexual orientation, but on a more amorphous sensuality, a more liberated somatics, and a more free-floating and diffuse conception of desire. Woolf implies that the stark dichotomy between masculine and feminine, homosexuality and heterosexuality, is a construction of metaphysical essentialism, an idea developed and theorized in *A Room of One's Own*, with its crucial concept of androgynous writing.

At the risk of committing one of the very acts of reductive classification which this text so effectively repudiates, *A Room of One's Own* can be schematized in such a way that it conforms closely to Toril Moi's equally reductive summary of Kristevan feminism. Moi sees three tiers to the Kristevan view of feminist politics. Firstly, 'women demand equal access to the symbolic order', secondly they 'reject the symbolic order in the name of difference', and finally they 'reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical'.¹⁷ Although such a summary is far from being comprehensive, or expressive of the meaningful textures of

Kristeva's writing, it clearly has strong resonances with the arguments, paradoxes, observations and speculations which dominate *A Room of One's Own*, as well as with the form and representations of subjectivity of *The Waves*.

A Room of One's Own begins by exploring the historical denial to women of the time, space, and economic opportunity to write and express identity. Playing with the binary trope of inside / outside, Woolf reinterprets historical exclusion as historical opportunity, so that being 'locked out' of patriarchal institutions becomes preferable to being 'locked in' (Woolf 25-26). She develops this into a deconstruction of the symbolic order and the symbolic code, and a repudiation of category, classification, and the masculine sentence, proposing that, instead, the 'book has somehow to be adapted to the body' (78). Finally, she 'rejects the dichotomy between masculine and feminine', arguing that it is 'fatal' to writing (and therefore to language) 'to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly' (102). This fluid conception of gender and sexuality repudiates the binary oppositions between homo and hetero, feminine and masculine, which imprison and deform sexuality and which are still being deconstructed by postmodern theory about sexuality and gender.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, in *The Epistemology of the Closet*,¹⁸ explores the theoretical consequences of the arbitrarily oppositional conceptions of sexuality and gender which earlier preoccupied Woolf. In some ways, Sedgwick sees the persistent ambiguity and indeterminacy of these terms as a function of post-structuralist thinking about language, and the anti-essentialism, relativity and pluralism of postmodernism, a state of affairs additionally deadlocked by stubbornly residual binary thinking. Sedgwick is basically arguing that contradictory, co-existing definitions of sexuality and gender (minoritizing versus universalizing views, innate and acquired 'explanations' of homosexuality, separatist versus

inversion theories) allow for a subtle, persisting oppression, whereby contradictions and incongruities cause any rational adjudication to be indefinitely deferred. She argues that '...homosexual definition...is organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence. It holds the minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who "really are" gay; at the same time it holds the universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities; that apparently heterosexual persons and object choices are strongly marked by same sex influences and desires...' (56). Thus, the absurd situation obtains whereby there is, simultaneously, discrimination against a perceived minority, and stigmatization of universal impulses which threaten relegation to the minority status which would deny this self-same universality. This results in the destabilization of subjectivity and the social coherence of individuals who define themselves as gay and those who participate in acts defined as homosexual:

'To be gay in this system is to come under the radically overlapping aegises of a universalizing discourse of acts and minoritizing discourse of persons. Just at the moment, at least within the discourse of law, the former of these prohibits what the latter of them protects...' (57)

The epistemological confusion surrounding issues of gender and sexuality results in 'the creation of a field of intractable, highly structured discursive incoherence at a crucial node of social organisation, in this case the node at which any gender is discriminated' (59). Kristeva, perhaps, offers some way out of this impasse, or at least the opportunity to consider the prehistory of the problem, by focussing on the pre-oedipal, pre-objectal, pre-symbolic constitution of the subject, the imaginary moment before the construction of gender. The notions of the semiotic chora and the survival within the subject of the semiotic disposition point towards ways of deconstructing and dismantling the destructive rigidity of binary gender and sexual

definitions. The character of Neville in *The Waves*, in this context, can be seen as a study of heterosexist intolerance of sexual difference, and the epistemological instability and 'discursive incoherence' inherent in patriarchal social organisation of gender and sexuality.

In addition to foregrounding and problematizing issues of gender and sexuality, Neville's monologues in *The Waves* also express another alternative relationship with language, knowledge and history. His is a sensibility in conflict with Enlightenment rationalism and its concomitant myth that language can be impartial and transparent, so that his attempts to conceptualize himself are invariably self-deconstructing, and tinged with a destructive irony. If Bernard resembles the novelist and the historiographer, struggling with phrases and sequences, Neville is the failed poet, mutating into the parasitic, analytical critic. He is a 'clinger to the outsides of words' (40), reluctant to be absorbed into Bernard's disintegrating and inconclusive narratives, his 'foolish comparisons' (32), instead longing for 'privacy' and the unobtainable object of his secret desire. The secret of his homosexuality conforms to the paradoxical, irrational logic of the open secret and the epistemology of the closet, while his analytical rationality systematically corrodes the consolations which his sensitivity, or femininity, persistently offers up.

The ocularcentrism implicit in the metaphor of enlightenment, the Cartesian rationality which allows Neville to 'see everything - except one thing - with complete clarity' (111), which ratifies his sense of 'sovereignty' and 'possession of power', simultaneously subverts his life-project of listening with 'patience and infinite care' (170) for the 'one sound he waits for' (171), the realisation of his secret subjectivity and the 'inscrutable law' of his being (51). Neville embodies a mode of being and knowing founded on the dissociation of intellect and sensibility, a

dislocation between the visible and the invisible, between the hegemonic eye, the eye as ontological centre of the rational ego, and the self as a membrane or 'net whose fibres pass imperceptibly beneath the world', a metaphor for identity whose natural sensory correlative is the ear. He is torn between the hegemony of the eye and the ear of the other, or, rather, the otherness of the ear. Once within the private space of his room, for instance, he need not 'speak', but he is able to 'listen...with patience and infinite care', to the 'cheep, cheep' of the fire, and the 'sounds of a London night', rejecting nothing in 'fear or horror'. In closeted solitude, he is 'marvellously on the alert', but freed from the constraints of rational analysis, able to 'throw caution to the winds' and 'accept absolutely' the nature of his subjecthood (170-1).

All of the characters in *The Waves* are secret subjects whose subjectivities are open secrets, but Neville's subjectivity is the one which is most insistently predicated on privacy and solitude. Neville carries his 'credentials' in his 'private pocket' to prove his 'superiority' (181), an image which epitomises his accumulation of ontological secrets, and his attempts simultaneously to defy his social determination, and compete aggressively within the determining social formation by which he is constituted as a subject. Ironically, the cultural ideal of selfhood which assures his 'superiority', that of a masculine, impersonal, contained rationality, also denies the sexuality which is integral to the 'inscrutable law' of his being, ensuring that he is divided from himself.

In his essay 'Secret Subjects, Open Secrets', D.A. Miller argues that 'secrecy would seem to be a mode whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject's formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible to the culture that would otherwise entirely determine him...'.¹⁹ If secrecy is a means of eluding social determination then fiction is one way of preserving the secrecy of subjectivity while

simultaneously disclosing it. In this sense, the secret subject of a novel is always 'an open secret', revealed to the reader if not to the other characters. *The Waves*, which situates its interactions beyond, beneath, or in the silent interstices of sociality, takes this a step further, so that the secrets of subjectivity of the various characters are mysteriously, telepathically known to each other, as well as the reader. The monologues inter-react and inform each other, as if they were amenable to some mutual inner ear. In fact, intersubjectivity in the novel invariably operates on a secret, unspoken level, so that the text functions as a history of the non-verbal, secret interactions between individual subjects, interactions unacknowledged by the conventions of sociality, and which elude the totalizing system of language. *The Waves* makes explicit areas of knowledge, which inform, even determine, the formal History which works to deny and exclude them, creating discursive spaces which are foreign to discourse. Thus Louis knows that Rhoda has 'no body as the others have' (18), Bernard knows that 'Louis was disgusted by the nature of human flesh', that Neville 'wanted order' (207) and 'sought out one person, always one person to sit beside' (210). The secret of Neville's subjectivity, his homosexuality and homoerotic adoration of Percival, are open secrets, known, and to some extent shared, by the other characters. At the same time, the multi-vocal, multitimbral structure of the novel, its fractured and multiple perspectives, its internal inconsistencies and contradictions, assure us of the pluralism, partiality, and relativity of histories. We are made aware of the fluidity or instability of hermeneutic positions, so that there is a provisionality about such mutual (and self) knowledge, even if the originary events of subjecthood are seemingly fixed and immutable.

Neville's preference for 'rooms and libraries', for the solitary severity of Roman poets, his desire for 'firelight, privacy, and the limbs of one person' represent one aspect of his resistance to the assimilatory operations of public history:

'In a world where the explicit exposure of the subject would manifest how thoroughly he has been inscribed within a socially given totality, secrecy would be the spiritual exercise by which the subject is allowed to conceive of himself as a resistance...secrecy would thus be the subjective practice in which the oppositions of private / public, inside / outside, subject / object are established...The paradox of the open secret registers the subject's accommodation to a totalizing system that has obliterated the difference he would make...' (207)

Such a reading explains the insistent image of the curtain, which occurs in both Neville's own monologues and Bernard's final summing up. The curtain demarcates public and private, separating inside and outside, suggesting the deliberate, volitional assertion of privacy, the repudiation of the gaze of the other, and the demarcation of secret, closeted, intimate space. It is the emblem of Neville's resistance to his social determination, but also suggests the limits of intersubjective reciprocity within the narrative structure of the monologues themselves. In this respect it conforms to the epistemological logic of the closet, the private space within a private space, which is, in the terms of a double paradox, secret public knowledge, or an open secret.

Neville worships classical masculine beauty, positioning him as part of a historical tradition of closeted homoeroticism, which in turn permeates, from the inside, the heterosexist culture which casts it as the other. The heterosexist hegemony styles itself as synecdochic, and fails, with predictable oversight, to acknowledge the presence of the homoerotic which defines so many traditionally male cultural formations and practices. Neville's adoration of Percival is consistent with patriarchal valorisation of the strong, silent, opaque, masculine hero, suggesting that a repressed homoeroticism and an aggressive, compensatory heterosexism are at work in patriarchal culture, in all exclusively male institutions (the army, the church, the public school, the university), and at the heart of the colonial or imperial enterprise itself. The relationship between sexuality, opacity, secrecy and

colonialism will be further explored later in this chapter, with reference to Percival, the blank, absent centre, or central absence, of the text.

4.4 Jinny: the epistemology of the dance

Jinny's apprehension of the world is predicated on sensuality and perpetual movement. Her first perception in the novel evokes the eroticism of opulent colours and fabrics ('I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny, 'twisted with gold threads.' (6)) She imagines bubbles in a boiling saucepan, rising 'quicker and quicker, in a silver chain' (8). The moment when she kisses Louis is preceded by a concentration of intensely active verbs describing rapid movement (eleven in a single paragraph), running, moving, dashing, quivering, dancing (10), and the theme of motion and dancing informs almost all of her subsequent monologues, to one extent or another.

She inhabits the present moment, experiencing her body ecstatically and holistically, so that she hates the 'small looking-glass on the stairs', which shows only her head, preferring to see her 'body and head in one'. When she moves, she 'ripples all down (her) narrow body', and never ceases to 'move and dance' (34-35), observing herself with a narcissistic pleasure. Indeed, for Jinny, life is a 'hoard' of pleasure, to be disposed of at her will (54), but a hoard that is, by definition, finite, and with which she is wilfully profligate. At the same time, she is incapable of following 'any thought from present to past', and does not dream (35). Hers is an epistemology based on evasion and escape, triumphal, if ephemeral, realised through a sustained consciousness of her body's sensuality, movement, and eroticism. Significantly, she both burns and shivers, 'out of this sun, into this shadow' (8), so that her perpetual motion becomes a feverish strategy to deny death, to remain in the sun and escape the shadow. This endless erotic dance with

herself, however, means that she is never still enough to be fully integrated into the sociality towards which she reaches out. Unlike Susan, 'home and the family remain essentially closed to her',²⁰ so that the price of her pursuit of pleasure is a certain self-consuming rootlessness. She inhabits the 'only here' and the 'only now' (W 19), where there is 'nothing staid, nothing settled in this universe.' Instead 'all is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph' (38). Her sensuality is partly expressed in a series of recurring images, a billowing dress, a gilt chair, the colour gold, while her attractiveness and ability to magnetize men is typified by the repeated refrain "Come," I say'.

At the same time, her incessant animation conceals a curious stasis, a sense of perpetual waiting and preparedness for something that never quite materialises. In his summing up, Bernard notes that for Jinny 'there was no past, no future; merely the moment in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy' (217). Even as she begins to age, noticing how shrunken she has become, she continues to be defiant, continuing to move, continuing to live in the moment of her fading radiance (165).

The clearest statement of her way of knowing and being in the world consists of a repudiation of 'facts', which depend for their validity on the very temporal sequence which she ignores or rejects, followed by an eroticization of colours, textures and, particularly, sounds. Not only is she sexually liberated, placing her faith in the 'body's imagination' (150), she also denies orthodox masculine History, with its monocular perspective of 'events' and its rigid systems of classification (150-152):

'I cannot take these facts into some cave and, shading my eyes, grade their yellows, blues, umbers into one substance. I cannot remain seated for long. I must jump up and go... I drop all these facts - diamonds, withered hands, china pots and the rest of it - as a monkey drops nuts from its naked paws' (150-151).

Instead of hierarchies, categories and sequential chronology, she sees 'things in outline', and lives in the rapture of the erotic moment, at home in the immediate sensations of her body. Her monologues thus provide another alternative subjective history, a history based on the immediacy of sensuality and the somatic. This primordial apprehension of experience is vividly evoked when she imagines herself 'pursued through the forest', where 'all is rapt, all is nocturnal, and the parrots go screaming through the branches' (151):

'Now let us sing our love song - Come, come, come. Now my gold signal is like a dragon-fly flying taut. Jug, jug, jug, I sing like the nightingale whose melody is crowded in the too narrow passage of her throat. Now I hear the crash and rending of boughs and the crack of antlers as if the beasts of the forest were all hunting, all rearing high and plunging down among the thorns. One has pierced me. One is driven deep within me' (151-152).

The triple repetition of 'now' evokes presence and instantaneity, while the onomatopoetic call of the nightingale and the reiteration of 'come' establish the eroticism of the passage. The animal imagery is primarily aural, both primordial and violent. The eroticization of sound and the sensuality involved in the production of the voice from the 'too narrow passage of the throat' is completed by the image of penetration, 'one has pierced me'. Sound, too, of course, penetrates the body, through what Derrida has described as the 'invaginated orificiality' of the ear, so that hearing itself is eroticized in Jinny's monologue. This is a dark and primal eroticism, though, invoking death as well as sex, violence as well as sensuality, reminding us of the presence of the 'shadow', which her ceaseless animation strives to evade.

Julia Kristeva, in 'Sabat Mater', theorises the eroticization of hearing and the voice, based on the body of the virgin mother, Mary:

'We are entitled only to the ear of the virginal body, the tears and the breast. With the female sexual organ changed into an innocent shell, holder of

sound, there arises a possible tendency to eroticize hearing, voice, or even understanding... Feminine sexual experience is thus rooted in the universality of sound...'21

This would seem to be true of Susan, as well as Jinny, though eroticism for Susan exists in the acoustics of the choric enclosure, whereby the mother surrounds the infant with the melody of her own voice, while for Jinny it manifests itself in terms of the permeation and penetration of the body. Knowledge and subjecthood for Jinny, then, consist of a fearless spending of the body's sensual 'hoard', and an equally fearless disregard for the patriarchal tyranny of facts and chronological History, so that even when the hoard is nearly spent, and she is 'grey' and 'gaunt', she is 'not afraid' (190). She accepts that her courageous profligacy with her own body's resources means that after the 'fire', 'there is nothing left to put in lockets' (200), no validating 'evidence' of her kind of lived life. She has evaded the illusion of 'events', effacing herself from the History which would classify her and neutralise her animation and vitality with its rigid definitions and fixed values.

4.5 Rhoda: inhabiting abjection

Rhoda's monologues express a mode of being which rejects conventional conceptions of time and space, repudiates sequence, and renounces stable identity. She voices an epistemology which fundamentally disengages from the symbolic, and operates instead within the regime of the semiotic, in the realm of dream-states, abjection, sublimity and psychosis. She is a visionary, 'outside the loop of time' (17), exchanging the visible world for clairvoyance, sight for insight, sense for alterity. She hears the history hidden inside History, and, like Jinny, knows the violence, rapture and discontinuity of the moment. She is not contained by her body, however, or confined to the spaces made by objects, movements, rhythms, or sequential, linear temporality. She inhabits abjection, wanders

borderlessness, intuits the sublime, and is intimate with the powers of horror.

Rhoda's epistemology is anti-teleological and non-sequential. She has 'no end in view' (111), but she feels, hears and expresses the imminence and immanence of the end of things, looming oblivion and the pervasiveness of lack. Her discourses are made up of images of transition, of misfits, pretence, discontinuity, incongruity, the freakish, change, fluidity, hardness and softness, the strangeness of both the palpable and the impalpable. She desires 'lodgement', but dreams of 'pilgimages' and 'moments of departure'; she is faceless and eyeless, but sees hidden structures behind surfaces, the 'oblong' set upon the 'square', with the 'spiral...on top' (139); she is 'blind', but sees feelingly; her body melts, becomes transparent, reconstitutes itself, and traps her; she floats between consciousness and unconsciousness, is suspended in space, she fears, sinks and flies; her mode of being is predicated on perpetual change, perpetual estrangement, remorseless difference, inescapable alterity; she is susceptible to sudden shocks, the 'leap of the tiger', vulnerable to violent disclosures; her vision swims and melts and her identity fragments and diffuses, she is trapped in the here and now, but travels in immensities of psychic space, unanchored to her own corporeality; she is alienated from her body, but thinks in bodily metaphors; others are a 'hostile mob', the particularities and quiddities of identity are 'antics' (192) or monstrosities; she suffers from both a surfeit and an absence of meaning; she dreams of the elsewhere and the other, of veils, flowers, garlands, pools, foam, whiteness, of a classical arcadia of ruined columns and dark pools; she sees and touches nothing, but the sea 'drums' in her ears. Like Louis, her first perception in the novel is aural ("I hear a sound," said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.'" W 6), whereas the opening 'utterances' of the others are all visual, describing colours and shapes.

Even more than the other characters, Rhoda has no character, defying the

conditions of the novel's form (which is predicated on the persistence of the different subjecthoods represented) by dying, the ultimate entry into abjection and 'the final devastation of the sign',²² by subsiding into silence, by leaking out through the interstices and crevices of discourse. Woolf, so to speak, places her beyond her own novelistic reach, beyond the reach of the words of the text, allowing, or rather refusing to impede, her departure, her haemorrhage into the outside and transgression of language itself. She is a stranger to herself and foreign to a text which is itself foreign to the traditional rhetorics and illusions of fiction. She is also foreign, paradoxically, by virtue of her unspeakable, unthinkable familiarity. In her strangeness lurks the shock of recognition. She defines the dissociation of language from meaning, leaving emptiness behind her in the trace of her voice. Her delirium opposes and subverts the totalitarian project of Bernard's stories, offering an antithetical model of failure in the treatment of what Kristeva calls the 'malady' of the modern soul.²³ Of all Woolf's fictional subjects, she most closely conforms to Kristeva's definition of abjection, where all borders and demarcations sublimely or fearfully dissolve.

The border between inside and outside, for example, between enclosed consciousness, or being, and the containing receptacle of the body, the very integrity of the body's surfaces, are persistently depicted as unstable in Rhoda's monologues. She feels disembodied, has 'no face', and she sinks into non-corporeality. In her extended monologue at the end of the third section, she describes her body as 'ill-fitting' (90), but evokes body parts repeatedly to express her psychic state, the tongue, the breast, the face, the knees, the fist. She is 'broken into separate pieces', becoming, in a densely alliterative passage, the 'foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness', but she is also a 'girl, here in this room' (91-92). She feels transparent and is permeated by the noises and 'uproar' of the object world:

'In capturing Rhoda's dream states through metaphors of the body, Woolf makes her mind "transparent" by making it visible. She thus externalises the internal and creates a narrative mind space.' (Laurence 168)

These contradictions within Rhoda's monologues, the externalization of interiority, the paradox of eyeless 'vision', bodilessness expressed through corporeal metaphors, the competing desires for 'lodgement' and endless departures, can all be seen as articulations, or extrapolations of the central paradox of abjection; the presence of the strange within the familiar, and the shocking familiarity of that strangeness as it engulfs the subject. Rhoda's anxiety is the product of an irruption of something 'familiar and old-established', which has become alienated from the mind through the process of repression, and which is experienced as a kind of uncanny malevolence, at odds with ontological coherence and the symbolic regime (*The Portable Kristeva* 284-285). Rhoda is thus the universal alien, at once seductive and repellent, exotic in her delirious and visionary psychosis, but disturbing in that this same psychosis threatens us with recognition, identification, familiarity. Her monologues express a 'homesickness'²⁴ for the forgotten but familiar foreigner from whom we are all divided by language, but from whose abject and sublime ontological chaos language also shields us. The process of reading and listening to her 'soliloquies' (and, indeed, to the discourses of the novel as a whole) invites rejection of the language to which we simultaneously attempt to cling in an effort to shore up the dispersal and incoherence of identity. Her words, as it were, lure us away from language, only to elude and abandon us, finally, leaving a powerful apprehension of lack and perpetual deferral.

4.6 Louis: postcolonial perspective

The character of Louis is full of unresolved contradictions of which he himself is painfully aware, contradictions which stem, partly at least, from his colonial origins.

On the one hand he is a romantic, signified by his persisting attachment to his attic room, with all of its associations with the artist's garret, also the primary location of his love affair with Rhoda. On the other, he is the international merchant, dedicated to making money, 'half in love' with the technology of the 'modern' office, the 'typewriter and the telephone', which can connect him to 'Paris, Berlin, New York' (143). In this incarnation, he imitates the habits, ideology and mannerisms of the host capitalist culture, without ever really becoming fully assimilated by these codes. He remains the 'ghost of Louis, an ephemeral passer-by' (57), a mimic.

Louis is the colonial boy, ashamed of his Australian accent, who, ironically, assumes the role of the commercial colonizer, the international capitalist, 'spreading commerce where there was chaos in the far parts of the world' (143). He seeks to reduce the world to 'order', but never really resolves the paradoxes of his own identity. He shares Rhoda's alienation, always on the outside of the culture to which he wishes to belong, and in which, superficially at least, he becomes a great success. At the same time, his monologues express the peculiarly astute insights of the outsider, and, of all the characters except Bernard, he is perhaps most aware of the six individuals' interdependence and intersubjectivity.

Louis is tied to a strictly linear temporality ('Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres sharp at four-thirty', 143), but at the same time imaginatively identifies himself with Plato and Socrates, 'camels swaying and men in turbans' (9), and the kings and queens of Egypt. He also realises that 'human history' can be 'defrauded of a moment's vision' if the subject ignores the 'meeting-place of past and present' (56), burying himself in the past or obsessively projecting himself into the future, and yet his mercantile career demands just such a traditional, 'masculine' approach to time. He floats outside of his host culture, yet feels 'rooted to the middle of the earth' (9).

He has a strong sense of History, but the recurrent trope of the 'chained beast' stamping on the beach signifies an intuition of timelessness, an awareness of the universality of death and the immemorial confinement of human mortality. And all of these 'discrepancies' are 'hideously apparent' to him, so that, even while still at school, he identifies his life project as 'some gigantic amalgamation' between them (44), a strategy of syncretism, whereby the dualities and ambivalences inherent in his colonial origins (and his very subjecthood itself) can be resolved.

Louis' way of being and knowing, then, his epistemology as expressed in his monologues, could therefore be said to share some of the defining features of postcolonialist discourses. His predicament articulates typical postcolonial paradoxes and binarisms, such as the blurring of centre and margins, inside and outside, the interrogation of History and temporality, the problems of belonging and alienation, self-expression and assimilation, the role of language and accent, a certain ontological confusion or pluralism, and the subtle relationship between mimicry and mockery.

To start with, Louis' mimicry, however, is the product of a desperate need to belong, rather than any ironic or satirical intent. Early in his commercial career, amongst the other 'clerks' in the eating house, for example, he tries to 'look like the rest', but cannot with any 'conviction'. He imitates their behaviour, watching the 'little men at the next table', but cannot feel at ease. He is conscious of the rhythm of the eating-house, 'like a waltz tune', expanding and contracting, but he is 'not included', and when he speaks, 'imitating their accent, they prick their ears', waiting for him to speak again, so that they can place him. He remains 'alien, external'. Wishing to feel the 'protective waves of the ordinary', he can't help glimpsing 'some far horizon', and is disturbed by his perception of 'perpetual disorder' in the movements and behaviour of his colleagues (79 - 80). Later though, there is a

sense of dry, slightly bitter irony as he contemplates inheriting a 'chair and a rug', and acquiring 'a place in Surrey with glass houses, and some rare conifer, melon or flowering tree which other merchants will envy' (145). This understated satirical tone develops to include self-mockery, as his mimicry modulates into something approaching disguise, with his expensive coat, hat, and gold-topped cane, props which he recognizes as integral to his authority (171).

Because of his persisting sense of estrangement, therefore, Louis' attempts at assimilation, his mimicry of the culture from which he is excluded, mutate into mockery, not only of the aspirations of the mercantile classes, but of the emptiness of his own situation. His assumed assimilation and simultaneous exteriority provide a disruptive double perspective whereby the authority of orthodox, colonial History is subverted. Through his monologues, Woolf is attacking not only the hollow materialism and moral bankruptcy of imperial commerce, but the absurdity of the hereditary principle, and the rigid class system whereby the agents of commerce are relegated to a status inferior to that of the established professions. As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, in the postcolonial situation, there is an inescapable reciprocity between mimicry and mockery, whereby imitation becomes a disruptive form, threatening the integrity and validity of the colonizers' dominant social and cultural formation:

'The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.' (Bhabha, 88)²⁵

Thus, through this disclosure of ambivalence, the hegemony of the colonizers' version of History is dissipated, so that 'what emerges between mimesis and mimicry' is a discourse 'that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model' (Bhabha 87-88). The cumulative effect of Louis' monologues would certainly seem to approximate to Bhabha's formulation.

Duality in the perceptions of Louis also extends into his experience of time, again a phenomenon shared with much postcolonial discourse, where the colonial past informs the present in a peculiarly intense way, while aspects of indigenous history are often effaced or erased, having to be reclaimed or re-inscribed in fictional texts . On the one hand, Louis is what Rachel Bowlby calls 'the would-be master and maker of global order, whose time is exactly that of the mechanical clock' (90),²⁶ personifying the 'fantasy of complete mastery' (114) integral to the imperial project. Certainly his desire to reduce everything to 'order' is authentic, bearing no traces of irony, but this impulse could also be seen as an index of the intensity of his desire to insert himself into the hegemonic formation from which he is excluded. At the same time, though, he experiences temporality in another, less sequential way, time as simultaneity, so that he remembers the 'Nile and the women carrying pitchers on their heads', weaving together the threads of history in the moment of the present (173), attempting to 'fix the moment' (32), and feeling that he has already lived for thousands of years. He also expresses a cosmic conception of time as infinite and abyssal, where the 'separate drops' of individual lives are 'dissolved' in the darkness (193). As with the oppositions between attic and office, Australian emigre and the merchant with gold-topped cane, however, these conflicting conceptions of time remain discrete and mutually exclusive. The 'discrepancies and incoherences' (172), of which he is so painfully aware, remain unresolved.

Aurality for Louis is closely linked to orality, again a function of his colonial origins. There are innumerable references to his Australian accent, the audible signifier of his otherness, and his relationships and perceptions are predicated on listening perhaps more than any of the other characters, he '*hears* to a greater extent than any of the other personalities' (Laurence 230). Like Rhoda, his first perception is auditory, and perhaps the most disturbing and disturbed of all the characters' initial

‘utterances’:

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’ (6)

This motif, initiating his pervasive apprehension of mortality, recurs repeatedly throughout Louis’ monologues, and, at the end of the fifth interlude, becomes explicitly related to death. The sound of the waves is ‘like the thud of a great beast stamping’, a description followed immediately by Neville’s announcement of Percival’s death. The positional emphasis on ‘stamping’ in the foregoing excerpt, and the almost obsessional reiteration of ‘stamps’ establish Louis’ susceptibility to the aural, and his vulnerability to the intrusiveness of sound.

Similarly, while Rhoda notices the birds singing, and Susan hears the noises of domesticity, the bucket ‘slammed down...on the kitchen flags’ (8), Louis is assailed by the insistent church bell, ringing ‘one, two; one, two; one, two’ (8), a repetition which suggests both the duality integral to Louis’ alienated, postcolonial situation, and the invasive voice of duty. Later, at school, he comments that the childrens’ lives ‘have been gongs striking’ (33). Bells in the novel tend to represent the call of established institutions, the church, the school, the formality of the drawing room, and the fact that he is so sensitive to these summonses paradoxically reinforces our sense of Louis’ estrangement, his exteriority to these institutions and practices. Through Louis’ acute ear for order and obligation, Woolf foregrounds the rigidities of English customs, social procedures and culture. Louis also makes the link between sound and modernity, describing the cacophany of the industrialised metropolis and revealing a fascination for new acoustic technology:

‘The roar of London,’ said Louis, ‘is all around us, Motor-cars, vans, omnibuses pass and repass continuously. All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds - wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merry-makers - are churned into one sound, steel-blue, circular. Then a siren hoots’ (115-116).

The discrete noises of the modern city fuse into another of Louis' favourite motifs, the 'steel-blue circle' or ring, an image which hints at the captivity of the subject in the industrial-mechanical age, as well as stability, order and perfection. In fact, Louis shares Rhoda's predilection for geometric shapes; she returns repeatedly to the oblong and the square, while he meditates on the circle and the pyramid. The pyramid, set on his 'shoulders', and harking back to his vision of Egypt, represents the 'burden' of his colonial and commercial origins, a burden which has 'always been greater than other people's' (142).

Despite his ontological and emotional ambivalence, and the duality of his postcolonial perspective, Louis is capable of being seduced by the order and coherence which his power and office provide. Signing his name over and over again, 'I, and again I, and again I' (142), he becomes 'uniquivocal', 'compact' and 'gathered together', fusing his 'many lives into one' (142-3). The emphatic reiteration of the first person pronoun, recalling the monolithic operations of an industrial machine, brutally asserts a cohesive, single identity. His plural personality, the 'furled and close-packed leaves' of his 'many-folded life', becomes summed up in his name, 'incised cleanly and barely' on a sheet of paper, compressed into the materiality of writing. Indeed, Louis learns the significance and power of names at school, from the 'boasting boys', Archie and Hugh, Parker and Dalton, Larpent and Smith (39), learns the coherence and continuity of heredity. A preoccupation with names and naming is, again, a typical feature of postcoloniality. The subject's assertion of his name, which is inherently untranslatable, affirms his singularity, while the 'elementary privilege of naming'²⁷ allows him to repossess experience.

Louis is also 'half in love' with the remote intimacy of the telephone, which allows him to issue 'brief but courteous commands' (143) around the world, while

retaining a quasi-anonymity and shielding his coloniality. There is even something sensual and erotic about his affair with this new technology which helps to 'lace' parts of the world together, spreading commerce and empire through the virtual space of the switchboard, when he confesses to 'love the telephone with its lip stretched to my whisper'. The precision and order provided by his office, therefore, along with the exosomatic power of the modern international merchant to project his voice and influence into the 'far parts of the world', help him to 'expunge certain stains' and 'erase' the 'old defilements' (143) of his colonial origins.

5. Percival: imperial myth, absent centre

Percival is the absent centre or central absence of the novel, the 'heroic' opacity by which, in many ways, the other characters define themselves, and towards which their monologues often gravitate. His arrival for dinner in chapter four, for example, inspires the others to return to the definitive events of their early childhood, to the vivid sensory coherence of their origins (106). His presence also promotes a profound intersubjectivity, a circle of mutual understanding where consciousnesses interpenetrate and briefly fuse together into a 'globe whose walls are made of Percival' (124). After his death, Bernard is in no doubt as to Percival's centrality and indispensability:

'About him my feeling was: he sat there in the centre. Now I go to that spot no longer. The place is empty.' (131)

At the same time, Percival's impenetrability can be seen as a function of the incompatibility between subjectivity and imperialism, between human and hero, ontological depth and the virtual reality of imperial rhetoric. Through him, empire is mythologized, sanitized and eroticized, but he is denied any interiority, existing only as a series of deflecting surfaces, a construct of the collective impressions and

idealizations of the other characters

Of all the characters, Neville is most preoccupied with Percival. His first description of him immediately establishes Percival's implacability and homoerotic appeal. His eyes are 'oddly inexpressive', fixed with 'pagan indifference' on the pillar of the school hall. He 'sees nothing' and 'hears nothing' and is 'remote' from his peers, but his smallest gesture inspires love and mimicry in his adoring acolytes (29 -30). There is nothing ethereal or mysterious about him, however, rather a dense solidity which defies engagement or intimacy, a physical impenetrability suggested, for instance, in his heavy nasal breathing. Even Louis, who resents the 'power of Percival intensely', recognizes his own need for him as a source of poetic inspiration (32 - 33). Neville imagines Percival's thoughts as totally focussed and blinkered, fixed on one thing only (41). Despite, or perhaps because of, his intellectual and critical brilliance, Neville admires this certainty and opaque completeness with a 'mystic sense of adoration', offering his very 'being' to Percival as his 'one god' (43). He loves him for his 'monolithic, his giant repose' (69), for his ignorance, his obliviousness, his crassness (51).

Percival's charisma and magnetism, his capacity to unite the other characters into a coherent whole, are demonstrated during the restaurant sequence in section four of the novel. Neville's nervous anticipation, awaiting Percival's arrival, modulates into a sense of unreality, where 'things quiver as if not yet in being', and the 'normal is abolished' in the 'prickly light' and 'intensity of being' which Percival projects, even in his absence (101). With his arrival, however, 'all oppression is relieved', 'all impediment is removed', 'the reign of chaos is over', and normality and order are restored (104). Bernard recognizes him as 'conventional', a 'hero' whose simple presence permits a renewal of intimacy and solidarity amongst friends who had been preoccupied with solitary and 'single experiences' (105). Rhoda, Jinny

and Louis experience a widening of their senses, so that 'membranes, webs of nerves that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round [us] like filaments, making the air tangible and catching in them faraway sounds unheard before' (115). Again, aurality is at the forefront of this sensitization.

It is Bernard who gives the almost supernatural effect of Percival's presence a colonial or imperial slant, imagining the latter's impact on the supposed inertia of India and its 'incompetent natives':

"I see India," said Bernard. "I see the low, long shore; I see the torturous lanes of stamped mud that lead in and out among ramshackle pagodas; I see the gilt and crenelated buildings which have an air of fragility and decay as if they were temporarily run up buildings in some Oriental exhibition. I see a pair of bullocks who drag a low cart along the sun-baked road. The cart sways incompetently from side to side. Now one wheel sticks in the rut, and at once innumerable natives in loin cloths swarm round it, chattering excitedly. But they do nothing. Time seems endless, ambition vain. Over all broods a sense of the uselessness of human exertion. There are strange sour smells. An old man in a ditch continues to chew betel and to contemplate his navel. But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the west, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were - what indeed he is - a god." (116)

This classic colonial fantasy simultaneously elaborates all of the stereotypes about the Indian sub-continent and ironically deconstructs them. The themes of disorder, incompetence, inertia, squalor, futility, the absence of human individuation, paralysing introspection, and so on, are all invoked as justifications for the imperial presence, personified by the god-like Percival, complete with white sun-helmet. The natives 'swarm', as indistinguishable as ants in their loin cloths, and chatter like children, their work incompetent, their buildings 'ramshackle', their roads twisting and idiotically unplanned, the simplest accident rendering them impotent and introverted. With the arrival of the quasi-divine Englishman, the problem is

immediately solved, to the wonder and gratitude of the credulous natives. Thus irony percolates through the passage too. Bernard's richly imagined visual surveillance of the cluttered, disordered landscape is certainly an act of rhetorical appropriation, but the repetition of 'I see' is laboured and slightly absurd, casting him as some cheap colonial clairvoyant, seduced by his own purple prose and rhetorical facility. Indeed, he can only imagine the buildings in terms of a simulation, 'some Oriental exhibition', confessing to a vision of India which is little more than pre-arranged, stereotyped simulacrum. It is debateable whether Woolf intends Bernard to be orchestrator or victim of irony, but his rhetoric certainly becomes somewhat overblown, with the biblical resonance of 'behold' and the portentous, heavily deliberate syntax.

With the arrival of Percival, the absurdity is increasingly blatant. Oddly, he rides a 'flea-bitten mare', while his application of the 'standards of the west' is tellingly vague and trivialising. With a simple scattering of violent language amongst the clueless natives, the 'Oriental problem is solved', and the deification of the colonizer assured. In this passage, then, it seems clear that Percival's opacity is synonymous with the congealed rhetoric of colonial propaganda, essential to Woolf's satirical intentions, as well as to her interrogation of psychology, subjecthood and human interaction.

Section five, the relatively brief pivotal section of the novel, is concerned with the effects of Percival's death, primarily on Neville, Bernard and Rhoda. Neville is at first transfixed with shock, and then embraces his pain and grief. He is especially traumatised and tormented by the inexplicable contingency of Percival's death, but also sees chance as 'farce' (129). He forces himself to imagine the accident in graphic detail, the 'flashing trees', the sudden 'surge', the 'drumming' in Percival's ears, the blow, the 'world' crashing, and, again, the heavy breathing. The brutal

aurality of this description, our abrupt access to an inner ear, allows perhaps our most intimate experience of Percival, albeit at one remove. Neville also imagines the exotic, distant 'pavillion' (129) which is Percival's final resting-place, and men in 'riding-boots' and 'sun helmets', returning to the petrified rhetoric and inert, anachronistic imagery of colonialism. With this death Neville is now totally solitary, forever cut off from the 'secret' of his being, and doomed to play out a series of imitation love affairs.

The passing of Percival briefly disengages Bernard from the 'machine' of the modern world, the world of butchers delivering meat, sparrows alighting, old men stumbling along the street. He observes the continued working of the machine, noting its 'rhythm' and 'throb', but from outside. Tellingly, without Percival the machine has no centre (130 - 131). The British Empire, predicated on colonial expansion, is similarly vacuous and ideologically bereft between the wars, as imperialism struggles to evade its own redundancy and moral emptiness. Bernard, like Neville, graphically imagines the dying Percival, lying on 'a camp-bed, bandaged, in some hot Indian hospital while coolies squatted on the floor agitate those fans', fans whose precise name Bernard has forgotten (131). As with Neville, there is something remote, amnesiac, and nostalgic about this vision of India, as if it had already ceased to 'belong' to the Empire, or had always existed only as a vibrant, exotic illusion. Finally, exhausted by the effort of standing outside the 'machine', Bernard is eager to return to 'normality' and 'the usual sounds of tradesmen' (135).

For Rhoda, Percival's death elicits a profound ontological and perceptual shift, leaving her still more alienated, fragmented and psychotic than before. Houses in the street become insubstantial, 'reckless and random' cars 'race and roar' hunting her 'to death like bloodhounds', the 'human face is hideous', she feels 'alone in a

hostile world'. Strangely, she gladly embraces this new, abject reality, this 'terror' that Percival has gifted to her 'by his death' (136). She sees the dislocation, violence and chaos behind the superficial order of the decaying imperial power, and, in an intimation of death that foreshadows Bernard's closing speech, she returns Percival's 'present', throwing her violets into the waves. Thus Percival functions as both a projection of the fantasies and ideals of the other characters, facilitating their intimacy and mutuality, and the epitome of anachronistic colonial endeavour. By his death neither of these functions is fully realized, closure is thwarted, and the six voices are stranded between the competing discursive orders of growth, ageing, decline, and cycle, recurrence, stasis, the fluidity of their monologues concealing a fundamental immobility. At the same time, the colonial ideal deconstructs itself, subsiding into absurdity and irony, just as the Empire itself will founder on its own complacency and superfluity.

Notes

1. See Patricia Laurence's *The Reading of Silence*, p. 202.
2. Derrida's essay 'Speech and Phenomena' can be found in *A Derrida Reader*.
3. Jay, Martin. p. 501
4. See Derrida's *The Ear of the Other*. ('Otobiographies'), p.51.
5. Sartre, Jean - Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. 'An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology.' Trans. Hazel. E. Barnes. London:" Methuen, 1969. Nausea.
6. Woolf 'an eyeless book'. See Rachel Bowlby. *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
7. See sartré's *The Transcendence of the Ego: an Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*. Trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick: New York, 1957, p. 41 - 42.
8. *Les Femmes, la pornographie et l'erotisme*, Helene Cixous. Ed. Francoise Hans and Gilles Lapouge. Paris, 1978, p. 50. Quoted in Jay, 493.
9. Allan Megill's *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*: Berkeley, 1985, p. 260. Quoted in Jay p. 496.
- 10 Terry Eagleton, *Postmodernism*, p. vii
11. Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*. Ibid. p.198.

12. Kristeva's 'Talking about Polylogue' can be found in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, quoted in *Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 303.
13. Kristeva on Proust. Ibid., p. 3.
14. Kristeva's *Desire in Language*. Ibid., p. 247.
15. _____. 'Place Names', 286.
16. See Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror*.
17. Toril Moi, *Sexual / Textual politics*: p.12.
18. Extracts from Eve Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Closet* can be found in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, Routledge, 1993.
19. D.A Miller's essay 'Secret Subjects, Open Secrets', in *The Novel and the Police*, University of California Press, 1988, 195.
20. *Between Language and Silence*, Ibid., Howard Harper, p. 227.
21. *The Portable Kristeva*. Ibid., p. 320.
22. *The Eagleton Reader*. Ibid., p.196.
23. *The Portable Kristeva*. Ibid., p. 203.
24. _____. 285, quoting Freud.
25. *The Location of Culture*. Homi K. Bhabha, p. 88.
26. *Feminist Destinations*. Ibid., Rachel Bowlby, p. 90, 114.
27. Derek Walcott's, 'The Muse of History' can be found in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1994.

1. Narrating the nation

The village community of *Between the Acts*, clustered around Pointz Hall, represents a microcosm of the national community, a symbol of England poised on the brink of war. Although the international situation is referred to only fitfully, the imminence of conflict and unthinkable destruction broods ominously over everything, so that William Dodge can remark on 'the doom of sudden death' hanging over the proceedings of the pageant and the lives of the villagers (70). The 'future' shadows the 'present', like 'the sun coming through the many-veined transparent vine leaf', irresistible, inevitable and chaotic, 'a criss-cross of lines making no pattern' (70). Miss La Trobe's play, therefore, is rehearsed and performed in an atmosphere of some unreality, with History and temporality uncannily suspended in a summer stasis of anticipation and endless anteriority. The 'acts' of the play, its shards of History and literature, its vision of the past and its (literal) reflection of the present, are therefore illuminated by an unseen, and largely unheard apocalyptic future, defamiliarising the ordinary; the spectacle of History is coloured by the poignancy of its own imminent end, giving the dramatic fragments a supplementary otherness beyond myth and memory.

Nor do the sociological limitations of rural life and fossilized social relationships limit the novel's capacity to speak for the nation as a whole. Invisible urbanicity, industrialised rearmament, continental conflict, and remote metropolis inhere in the stillness of the village, as the other, or double, of pastoral domesticity, all the more urgently so for their largely conspicuous absence. Indeed, collectivity combines with alterity in William Dodge's comment that 'there's no retreating and advancing... for us as for them' (70), articulating the binary oppositions of self and other, country

and town, home and abroad, familiar and foreign, interior and exterior, and their breakdown under the threat of imminent World War. Similarly, the novel as a whole both mythologizes and particularizes nationhood, in the sweeping diachrony of the pageant, and the minute, synchronic specificity of its social context.

But where, precisely, does Woolf locate the mysterious entity of the nation? It is certainly to be found in the 'acts' and in the intermissions between the acts, in the commemorative 'orts, scraps and fragments' of History and literature, and in the voices, thoughts, bonds and antique names of the village community. More, significantly, though, it falls between these two narrative orders, occupying a more complex and intangible interjacency. Homi Bhabha, in his essay *DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation*,¹ identifies two vacillating ideological and temporal orders which constitute the nation and split the 'national subject'. For Bhabha, the nation exists in 'double time', between the competing imperatives of 'pedagogy' and 'performance'. The 'pedagogical founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people', the many-as-one (a problematic concept in itself), whereby 'nation' is transmitted and regenerated through a form of cultural didacticism. This ideological order demands and sustains a temporality made up of a 'succession of historical moments that represents an eternity produced by self-generation'. The eternal 'meanwhile' of the pedagogical nation demands a temporality which is not only linear and sequential, but which insists that the present becomes 'succession without synchrony', an ideological aberration combining infinite deferral and perpetual retrospection, whereby the national subject is forever divided from nation, presence and self.

The 'performative', on the other hand, 'intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, Distinct from the Other or the Outside.'

Instead of 'the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation itself and extrinsic Other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between' through the 'gap' or 'emptiness' of the signifier that punctuates linguistic difference'. In these terms, the nation becomes a space that is marked by 'cultural difference', historical heterogeneity, 'antagonistic authorities', and the sliding, 'suddenness' and indeterminacy of the signifier itself. Bhabha finds a corollary for his ideas in Kristevan theories of time and the formation of the subject, whereby identity is simultaneously 'constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical)', and threatened in 'the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative)'. Although Bhabha doesn't make the point, both of these ontological processes relate to Kristeva's conception of the symbolic, since they both depend upon the signifier and the subject's entry into language. Nor, therefore, does he really explore the implications of the semiotic, or proto-linguistic, for the nation state, or, indeed, the prehistory of the nation itself. In Woolf's novel, on the other hand, the 'nation' would seem to fall not only between the double and competing temporalities of the 'pedagogic' and the 'performative', but also between the complementary epistemological regimes of the symbolic and the semiotic, occupying an interjacent territory which takes full account of primordially and the prelinguistic in the formation of the national subject, as well as the sediment of history deposited by language.

Bhabha does go on, however, to make a very suggestive identification between the 'pedagogic' and the visual. Because linear time is so inherently visualizable, because the moment, whether past, present or future, can easily be conceived of in spatial terms, 'National time becomes concrete and visible', thereby aligning the pedagogical version of the nation with ocularcentrism. He argues, for example, that the 'recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye

to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression'. This ocularcentrism, this rhetoric of national surveillance, and hegemony of visible time mean that the 'ghostly', the 'terrifying' and the 'unaccountable', those aspects of time and being which Kristeva would locate within the regime of the semiotic, are constantly 'surmounted' and dissipated in any discourse of nationhood. By the same token, and in Kristevan terms (though Bhabha, again, doesn't make this point), the 'ghostly' and 'terrifying' could be said to inhere substantially in the aural, in those traces of abjection, sublimity, and originary sonorous experience surviving within the semiotic disposition, the constant atemporal Other of the symbolic subject. Once again, in its free and sometimes savage use of the auditory, Woolf's novel not only challenges ocularcentrism, but would seem to attempt a more profound counter-narrative of 'nation' than even Bhabha's postcolonial thesis allows. This aspect of *Between the Acts* will be explored fully later in the chapter.

Concluding his essay, Bhabha invokes the weather as England's 'most changeable and immanent' sign of 'national difference'. Inscribed within this most ritualized, archetypal and pervasive of discursive topics, the English weather, is its other, or 'daemonic double', the 'heat and dust of India', the 'dark emptiness of Africa', and the 'tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission'. Beyond the temperate variety of the English summer lurk the alien extremities of heat and cold, desert and monsoon, defying colonial will and resilience. In *Between the Acts*, the location of the pageant is discussed, year after year, amidst prolonged speculation about the weather, which acts as some rogue contingency at the centre of imperial order, mimicking (or being mimicked by) the wilder extremes of far-flung dominions. The weather is a source of anxiety and potential disruption, causing the Swithins to keep a worried eye on the window. There is a 'fecklessness, a lack of symmetry

and order in the clouds', beyond which is the still more profound alterity and indifference of the 'black blue stratosphere, which escapes 'registration' altogether (16). It is as if the darkening and lightening skies are foreign as well as familiar, the cryptic signifiers of colonial angst as much as inklings of the gathering barbarism across the channel.

In fact, postcoloniality and nationhood are established from the outset by the adoption of a celestial perspective. Centuries of English archaeology become visible patterns from the privileged vantage point of the aeroplane, which discloses the 'scars' made on the landscape by the Britons, the Romans, the Elizabethans, and the agricultural demands of the Napoleonic wars (5). We are reminded that England, too, was once a colony, and may become so again. In a vulgar, ironic, and almost violent juxtaposition, we learn that the Roman road is to be the site of the village's new cesspool. The monuments of empire finish up polluted by sewage, a 'glorious' history ends in human excrement.

The aeroplane makes another appearance near the end of the novel, but this time, instead of enabling an aerial, cartographical-historical perspective, it is an impersonal instrument of violence and military efficiency. In the first instance we are privileged with the aviator's masterful, god-like view of the plotted and pieced landscape, reassuring us of the island's continuity and the nation's surviving singularity, despite a history of conquest and colonization. In the second, we share the villagers' terrestrial vulnerability, as 'twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation' fly overhead. That a sense of national individuation, security and identity are closely bound up with the mythologized isolation and independence of an island history is signalled by the fact that the opening words of the pageant allude to this very fact. But, as Gillian Beer points out in her essay 'The Island and the aeroplane',² the assumed invulnerability and territorial integrity of the island is also threatened by

developments in aviation (285). Furthermore, we are told by Lucy Swithin at the start of the novel that 'once there was no sea...at all between us and the continent', reminding us that nation is a fluid, fragile and complex construct of geography and narrative, mythology and the rhetoric of ethnography. The aeroplane in *Between the Acts* is an emblem of the incipient disintegration of the myth of the island nation, sovereign and singular, entire to itself. Even geological borders do not endow nationhood with territorial permanence and immutability. As Kristeva remarks in *Women's Time*, 'World War II, which was fought in the name of national values, brought an end to the reality of the nation, which it turned into a mere illusion'.³

2. The nation, the present and prehistory

If history is written on the land, readable from the air, then prehistory and primordality are written both in the subject and in creatures and vegetation, in the submerged barbarism of the human, as well as in birdsong and the bellows of cows. *Between the Acts* is permeated by the creaturely, the anthropomorphic, and the primeval. Mrs. Haines, the novel's first human subject, is a 'goosefaced woman with eyes protruding as if they saw something to gobble in the gutter' (5), an image of greedy bestiality which is not buried by civilization, but visibly inscribed on the face. The coughing of a cow leads her to recall a childhood encounter with a cart-horse, which had 'brushed within an inch of her face', suggesting the intimate proximity of the inhuman and the prehistoric. A bird chuckles with primitive lust over 'the substance and succulence of the day, over worms, snails, grit' (5). The opening sequence combines these images of animal appetite with an insistence on the visceral, in the Haines's apparent fascination with the location of the cesspool. The pervasiveness of the ancient, the corporeal and the atavistic are immediately established. The natural world is a place of violence, appetite, surfeit

and waste, coextensive with human civilization rather than subdued by it.

The national and the primordial connect explicitly in the reading and psyche of Mrs. Swithin, who imagines 'rhododendrons in the Strand' and 'mammoth in Piccadilly' (20), the first of many images placing prehistory in the present. The 'whole world' is filled with 'dumb yearning', with 'the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment' (85). Waking early, Lucy Swithin meditates on her reading of H.G. Wells' *Outline of History*, her mind swamped by images of monstrous fecundity and sensuality, 'elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth and the mastadon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend' (8). The disturbing universe of Darwin and the abhorrent kinship of species permeate the genteel domesticity of Pointz Hall, animated in a writhing syntax and a guttural accumulation of consonants and vowels. Darkness and primordality inform the contemporary nation as much as Shakespeare and the Enlightenment, surviving in the human psyche and the semiotic residue within language.

In her essay 'Virginia Woolf and Prehistory', Gillian Beer describes *Between the Acts*, with its 'easy vacillation between the domestic and the monstrous', as Woolf's most 'unsettling meditation on the meanings of prehistory'.⁴ Certainly the survival of the primal, the ubiquity of violence just beneath the tranquil surface, and the gross superfluity of the natural world are linked to the coming war, but they are also part of individual and national identity, immanent and alive in the present moment. The barbarism in Europe, the novel suggests, is also semi-dormant in the sleepy English village. Isabella Oliver, for instance, listening to the immemorial chiming of bells suddenly hears the phrase 'the girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer' (16). And Giles Oliver, kicking 'barbaric', 'pre-historic' stones during an

intermission in the pageant, comes across a snake 'choked with a toad in its mouth':

The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round - a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoe was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes.' (61)

The graphic detail, the palpable relish in this description reveals not only Giles's barbarism, but Woolf's own capacity for atavism, her unwillingness to exempt herself from this human potentiality. The episode also suggests that the aberrant and the freakish are part of nature too, that monstrosity and perversion are part of history, and that village and nation teeter on the brink of monstrous historical apocalypse. The novel ends with the 'heart of darkness' and 'the fields of night', with Lucy Swithin remembering that England was once a 'swamp' and human beings 'half-ape' (129). Subject and nation, Woolf suggests, still bear these traces.

3. Nation and history

3.1 The Pageant

The representation of nation in *Between the Acts* is closely linked, naturally enough, with its representation of history. The pageant, which itself is conceived as a pedagogical event, makes history and nation visible, as well as indivisible. But even the pageant is not simply nationalistic in a didactic way, or a triumphalist, heritage model of History. Miss La Trobe, like the author herself, attempting to make something significant out of her shards and fragments, offers a much more subtle, selective and revisionist view. Instead of 'Army', 'Navy', 'Union jack', she confronts her audience 'with silence and with mirrors; the present moment; emptiness; themselves; dispersal; diaspora' (Beer, BA xxxii).

The scenes of the play are interspersed with audience reaction, interaction and commentary, and with the clanking mechanics of theatrical production. The pageant is full of unrehearsed pauses and interruptions, relying on several occasions on the interventions of nature for its dramatic survival, and constantly accompanied by the 'chuff, chuff, chuff' of the mechanical generator and the scratch of the gramophone. The opening personification of the nation is followed by a semi-audible, semi-recognizable depiction of Chaucerian England, and then by emptiness and the 'tick, tick, tick' of the gramophone needle (51). History is murky, indistinct, punctuated by gaps and silences and artificial music. The entry of Queen Elizabeth prompts supplementary allusions from Giles Oliver in the audience, a fragment of King Lear, for example, alluding, once again, to prehistory, as well as to the Elizabethan age. Albert, the village idiot of the present, offers a pastiche of Poor Tom, the idiot of the literary past, whose folly is itself a disguise, in a complex interleaving of present and past, 'reality' and illusion. Plot dissolves into medley, the act ends with the gramophone scratching '*dispersed are we*', and action subsides into intermission and interjacency.

The next fragment represents the Restoration and the beginning of the Age of Reason under Queen Anne, and is dominated by a mock Restoration comedy. It also deals with the growth of Empire, the conversion of the 'heathen' and the proliferation of international commerce (75), which are satirized by the contiguity of the absurd, indulgent and cynical comedy. Empire is more explicitly attacked in the Victorian sequence, with Mr. Budge, the publican, dressed as a policeman, presiding with his truncheon over the 'traffic of 'Er Majesty's Empire' (97). Persia, Morocco, white men, black men, sailors, soldiers, and 'Fenians' all cower under the colonial cosh, but imperial rule 'don't end there'. Its discipline is also internal, extending over 'thought and religion; drink; dress; manners; marriage, too'. In a powerfully ocularcentric metaphor, the totalitarian Empire spies on 'cot', 'kitchen',

'drawing-room', 'library', justifying its activities in the name of 'purity', 'prosperity' and 'respectability' (97). Empire is figured in terms of visual surveillance and the ocular penetration of privacy, in Bhabha's formulation depicted as severely 'pedagogic' and paternalistic, equating nation with Empire, and citizenship with duty, labour and unswerving obedience. The Victorian era, moving into living memory for many of the audience, ends with a parody of domesticity, evasion and hypocrisy, and the singing of 'Rule Britannia' (101).

The final scene represents the present, with the cast holding up mirrors to the audience, who are presented with distorted, fragmented and partial images of themselves. Bodies and faces are disassembled into component parts in a visual deconstruction of the present moment. Like some metaphor for postmodernism, human subjects become a series of flashing and intermittent reflecting surfaces, while the cast enact a cacophonous and disjointed reprise of the historical pageant itself. The past becomes a dislocated and random soundtrack for a pluralised, schizophrenic and fragmented present. Out of the chaos comes a 'megaphonic, anonymous' voice, assailing the audience with their own failings, forcing them to confront their own puny dispensability, their status as 'orts, scraps and fragments' (111). Minute consolations are offered, 'kindness to the cat', the love of a deceased spouse, the 'resolute refusal of some pimpled dirty little scrub in sandals to sell his soul' (112), but these seem pitiful set against the incoherence, selfishness and hypocrisy only just revealed. Then, suddenly, 'like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted' are 'united' again (112). The imagery here suggests a kind of scientific determinism, with the disparate particles of the people fusing into a single mass, a community or 'nation', as if by virtue of some mysterious and irresistible physical law. According to Homi Bhabha, the 'political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space

that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. Quite simply, the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the people into One' (Bhabha). The pageant in Woolf's novel produces a 'signifying space' that is archaic and mythical, but one which both disperses and unifies the audience. The unitary congregation fragments into individual subjects between the scenes and then reforms, while the gramophone relentlessly intones the competing imperatives of 'unity' and 'dispersity', the spinning disc and the needle arm physically enacting the contradictory dynamics of the centrifugal and the centripetal. Miss La Trobe's selective and subversive history synchronizes the 'pedagogic' and the 'performative' versions of nation in the moment of the present, uniting monosonant myth and irredeemable heterogeneity, sequential time and instantaneity in its fragmentary gestures and tropes. History is made visible and poignant at the point of its imminent demise.

3.2 Interjacency and intermission

As the novel's title suggests, the times and spaces before, between, and after the episodes of the pageant are at least as important as the 'acts' themselves. Indeed the principles of anteriority, interjacency and posteriority are crucial to the text, to its engagement with history, its sense of the survival of the primordial and the imminence of apocalypse. The word 'between' is critical: the novel is set between the pre-eminent historical landmarks of the century, the two World Wars; history itself is suspended between peace and war, with political and social life frozen in impasse, a paralysis epitomized by the snake choking on the toad; the everyday life of the village is halted for the pageant, which itself is suspended during intermissions; relationships between the characters are largely fossilized by habit, repetition and social ritual, so that desire spills into the spaces between them; the text itself seems deadlocked between satire and celebration, mockery and

commemoration, irony and elegy; nation exists somewhere between the traditional and the modern, between pedagogy and performance, while the subject is immobilized between culture and nature, sense and sensibility, sex and death; the narrative skips from meticulous mimesis to uninhibited diegesis; meaning inheres between the symbolic and the semiotic, with signification situated in interjacency, in interruption, in intermittency, in the spaces and silences between words, in aural and typographical entropy. In fact, the whole novel is modelled on a theatrical interval, ending with a raised curtain and a final speech-act which promises to explain everything ('Then the curtain rose. They spoke.' 130), but which remains unspoken.

3.3 The nation and the name

There is a distinct preoccupation with ancestry, names, the antiquity of names and families, and the longevity of communities in *Between the Acts*. Names are the untranslatable signifiers of an untranslatable nationhood, and Woolf's novel is full of them. According to Kristeva, proper names are 'substantive of definite reference (therefore similar to the demonstrative) but of indefinite signification ("cognitive" as well as "emotive")'. They point to a referent, denote a subject or place, but their 'dynamic and semantic ambiguity', their 'lack of precision as to the notion of identity' mean that they have a peculiarly open-ended impact within 'unconscious and imaginary constructs'.⁵ The semantic ambivalence of names is an index of the ideological indeterminacy of nation.

Names are scattered and deposited throughout Woolf's text, but rarely explained, pursued, or even repeated. Instead, they are left to speak for themselves, to activate subliminal and indefinite responses in the reader about ancestry, tradition, and national identity. Sometimes they are even included for their *absence* of connection with the main protagonists, stubbornly and incongruously popping up in

the text, much as hereditary peers pop up in the House of Lords, simply by virtue of patronym. We learn, for instance, that the Olivers have 'no connection with the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets', those 'old families who had all inter-married, and lay in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall' (7). Here patronyms cluster and intertwine with primeval fecundity and the conflation of church and state, to produce a disturbing and incestuous image of the otherness of the nation-as-one. Antiquity blurs with hierarchy and deference, suggesting the obscure, semi-organic and faintly sinister structures and signifiers of national ontology. Unlike the Olivers, for example, who 'couldn't trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years', the Swithins 'were there before the Conquest' (21), a phrase suggesting quasi-immortality as well as the persistence of the name beyond the life of the subject. At the same time, and as Derrida argues,⁶ because the patronym precedes, exceeds and survives the subject who bears it, it is indelibly tainted with that subject's death, becoming a name of the dead. The littering of the novel with names, therefore, introjects a pervasive but subliminal sense of mortality and ephemerality, as well as invoking continuity, antiquity and tradition.

Elsewhere, Woolf scatters place names in an equally generous way. We learn that the village is surrounded by Bickley, Waythorn, Roddam, and Pyeminster, names recorded in the Domesday Book (21). The community, like the nation, is bounded by other similar, but foreign, communities, which both define it and threaten it with their alterity, signified in the indeterminacy of their names. The surrounding villages help determine the community's territoriality and identity, setting its boundaries and integrating its inhabitants. As Bhabha puts it, 'once the liminality of the nation-state is established, and its 'difference' is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-

one' (Bhabha). Woolf's novel explores that otherness on the inside of finite community and nation, and one of the ways in which it is invoked is through the semantic ambiguity of the proper name.

As the audience assembles for the pageant, the composition of the community is detailed in terms of patronyms and origins; there are the 'Dyces of Denton', the 'Wickhams of Owlswick', the 'new-comers, the Manresas', and 'Cobbet of Cobbs Corner'. Half of 'the ladies and gentlemen present', we discover, would have answered an imagined roll call with '*Adsum* ; I'm here, in place of my grandfather or great-grandfather', *adsum* meaning 'I'm present', and being the traditional public school response to the calling of the register. The indefinite otherness of names is further inscribed in the fact that 'Mrs. Sands was born Iliffe', and 'Candish's mother was one of the Perrys' (47). The maternal name can change, exhibiting a certain vitality, whereas the patronym is fixed and inanimate, recalling Derrida's comment that 'the mother is living on, and this living on is the name of the mother' (*On the Name*). Indeed, Kristeva suggests that names, and especially place names, function as a species of anaphoric reference, pointing back to the originary space and sonority of the semiotic chora, a space summarized by the 'archaeology of shifters'.⁷ Names in the novel, then, are both dead and alive, oscillating between the musty stasis of the paternal and the uncertain organicism of the maternal.

Finally, names themselves are satirized in the pageant, during the episode of the mock Restoration comedy. The names and relationships of the characters are read out at the beginning of the scene: 'Lady Harpy Harraden, in love with Sir Spaniel Lilyliver. Deb, her maid. Flavinda, her neice, in love with Valentine. Sir Spaniel Lilyliver, in love with Flavinda. Sir Smirking Peace-be-with-you-all, a clergyman. Valentine, in love with Flavinda' (76). These names parody and highlight the semantic instability of the novel's 'authentic' names, as well as the complex

interconnectedness of subjects within a community. Simultaneously registering continuity and otherness, the singularity of the referent and the indeterminacy of the signified, chronological time and felt time, the living subject and the dead ancestor, the familiar and the foreign, names, therefore, can be located in the space between 'pedagogic' and 'performative' formulations of nation.

3.4 Ellipsis, interruption, dispersal

History's heterogeneity, dispersal, and lack of fluidity are signified in *Between the Acts* by interruption, made visible in the novel's typographical diversity. The italicized fragments of the pageant, for instance, are interspersed with snatches of conversation and passages of narration. The narrative voice itself modulates between impersonal description and a self-absorbed, semi-autonomous and sometimes tangential experimentation with the sounds and meanings of words. The text is divided by gaps and spaces on the page, suggesting elided thoughts, conversations and actions lost to history. Utterances very often remain unfinished or interrupted, speakers pursue different discursive agendas, conversational topics succeed one another rapidly, randomly and incongruously. The pageant itself is interrupted by late-comers, technical hitches and the interventions of nature, its scenes interpreted differently by different individuals. The voices of the actors are often inaudible, dispersed by the wind or drowned in audience noise. The clutter, confusion and heterogeneity of the present also point to the awkward plurality of the past, a lack of coherence, Woolf suggests, smoothed out by the selectivity and partiality of historiography.

Rhythmically, then, *Between the Acts* is a deliberately awkward book. It jerks between disjointed, elliptical conversational exchanges, snatches of thought or speech, and exorbitant rhythms, echoes and rhymes, delivered sometimes by the narrator, sometimes by a character, sometimes issuing from a communality of

unspecified individuals. In *Feminist Destinations*,⁸ Rachel Bowlby explores the functions of ellipsis, or the 'dotted line' in Woolf's work, relating it to omission, discontinuity, temporality and the relationship of the woman writer to the masculine sentence. Spatially, the three dots encrypt disjunction, challenging the 'arbitrariness of a masculine line of progress' (164), and therefore the conditionality, selectivity and arbitrariness of patriarchal history. Ellipses also imply omissions, of what 'cannot be said', or what is forbidden, or what is 'not assimilable to the surrounding prose' (162-3). The woman writer, excluded or alienated from masculine discourse, situates herself in the interstices of the text, occupying a marginality that is encoded and declared in the three dots.

The confusion and disinformation surrounding contemporary events is also sometimes suggested by syntactical breakdown, semantic discontinuity, or elision. Miss La Trobe overhears 'scraps and fragments' of conversation as the audience is assembling for the pageant. One passage is especially fragmentary and elliptical:

'And what about the Jews? The refugees ... the Jews ... people like ourselves, beginning life again ... but it's always been the same ... My old mother, who's over eighty, can remember ... Yes, she still reads without glasses ... How amazing! Well, don't they say, after eighty ... Now they're coming ... No, that's nothing ... I'd make it penal, leaving litter. But then, who's, my husband says, to collect the fines? ... Ah there she is, Miss La Trobe, over there, behind that tree ...' (74)

Jewish diaspora and the incomprehension of the speakers are simulated in the scattering of sense, while the holocaust retroactively inscribes itself in the pauses and ellisions, as if Woolf was leaving spaces for future history to write itself. With hindsight, the phrase 'Now they're coming' takes on particularly sinister overtones, while the incongruous remark, 'I'd make it penal, leaving litter', encodes both historical obliviousness and incipient authoritarianism.

Ellipsis also suggests hesitancy about closure, acknowledging the fluidity, ambiguity and indefinite deferral involved in the signifying process. According to Kristeva, the 'elided object in the sentence relates to a hesitation (if not an erasure) of the *real object* for the speaking subject', which is the 'nonsemanticized instinctual drive that precedes and exceeds meaning'.⁹ Thus the profusion of ellipses in Woolf's novel can be related both to the prehistory of the subject and to the regime of the semiotic within language. These hesitations and syntactical cul-de-sacs correspond to an abject, unspeakable primordially, remembering the unsayable time and space of the semiotic chora. They also, therefore, remark upon hidden instincts and drives within nation and history, as well as within language.

4. The unstopped ear

4.1 Surrendering to the semiotic

The narrative voice in *Between the Acts* simultaneously embraces and surrenders to the auditory seductions of language with a peculiar combination of anarchic glee and diffidence. Sentences are often built up and connected together on the basis of rhythm, repetition, assonance and rhyme, as much as on the basis of meaning; the semiotic supplants the semantic as the organizational principle of the text's language, with the narrator the helpless or collusive witness to her own apparently compulsive and involuntary wordplay. Such passages of free association can be arranged in three categories.

Firstly, they seem to issue from the author or narrator herself, prompted by, or signifying, the static self-sufficiency of the community. Like the nurses, 'trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace' outside Pointz Hall, whose talk is not concerned with 'shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another', but with 'rolling words, like sweets on their tongues', the narrative voice

sometimes seems seduced by the sensuality and carnal 'sweetness' of language (9). Words become tangible and visible, 'pellets' or 'sweets', coloured 'pink or green'. The description of the house itself, for instance, is short-circuited by the irresistible lure of alliteration and repetition:

It was a pity that the man who had built Pointz Hall had pitched the house in a hollow, when beyond the flower garden and the vegetables there was this stretch of high ground. Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow. (9)

Language here loops impotently and lackadaisically back on itself, as if foundering on the misplaced self-assurance and stubborn self-absorption of the community. This same hermetic quality prompts other instances of linguistic obsolescence; confronted by his grandfather, 'George stood gaping. George stood gazing' (10), while later, during the pageant, 'the audience gaped; the audience gazed' (115). The narrator's resort to doggerel and surrender to redundancy or excess indicate not only the perverse organicism of language, but the incestuous organicism of the closed community, its strange fusion of fertility and sterility. Extrapolating nation from village, such tropes speak of a curious combination of exorbitance and paralysis, energy and immobility, in the make-up of the nation-state, an intolerable stale-mate of forces which accounts, Woolf perhaps suggests, for the imperial impulse and the need for foreign conquest.

Secondly, the semiotic dominates the symbolic in representing the semi-conscious thought processes of the characters. Mrs Giles Oliver, for instance, trying to describe to herself the 'tingling, tangling, vibrating' sensation she is feeling, gropes for the word to fit the 'infinitely quick vibrations' of an aeroplane propeller:

Faster, faster, faster, it whizzed, whirred, buzzed, till all the flails became one flail and up soared the plane away and away...' (12)

Repetition and onomatopoeia combine in an image of aspiration and desire for more than the stifling domesticity of marriage and village. Similarly, mentally completing her husband's unspoken prejudice against William Dodge's implied homosexuality, Isabella's thoughts formulate themselves in rhyme:

Isabella guessed the word that Giles had not spoken. Well was it wrong if he was that word? Why judge each other? Do we know each other? Not here, not now. But somewhere, this cloud, this crust, this doubt, this dust - she waited for a rhyme, it failed her; but somewhere surely one sun would shine and all, without a doubt, would be clear.' (39)

Here questions, alliteration and rhyme gather around an unsayable absence, reverberating in the cavities of the ear. The missing word suggested by the phonemic patterning, 'queer', remains unspoken, testifying to the rigidity of sexual taboo, while the desire for clarity and tolerance is dissolved in woolly alliteration. The verbal vitality reflects the social heterogeneity of the community, but, once again, the dynamic seems self-cancelling. Words cluster together by virtue of their aural kinship, their phonological cohesion, as much as on the basis of semantic coherence; individuals in the village are linked by similarly slender ties, by accidents of birth, class or geography. Communities of people, Woolf suggests, can be as tenuous as communities of words, yet both endure and regenerate themselves.

Collectivity and communal response are also registered through what Beer calls 'the semantic cacophany of rhyme', where 'auditory likeness' is divorced from 'referential reason'.¹⁰ In these cases, verbal echoes and patterns suggest whispering, animated gossip, the rapid formulation of opinion, and the knee-jerk adoption of positions and prejudices:

The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. Fox-trot was it? Jazz? Anyhow, the rhythm kicked, reared, snapped short. What a jangle and a jingle! Well, with the means at her disposal you can't ask too much. What a

cackle, a cacophany! Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. Such an outrage; such an insult; And not plain. Very up to date, all the same. What is her game? To disrupt? Jog and trot? Jerk and smirk? Put the finger to the nose? Squint and pry? Peek and spy? (109)

The community's reaction to Miss La Trobe's play is a comic mixture of the curious, the defensive, the patronising and the conservative, almost an affirmation of collective incomprehension. The passage enacts the hysterical momentum of mass opinion, transmitting mood rather than meaning, an instinctive sense of communal crisis rather than an agreed critique. The breakdown in the music inspires a closure of ranks; challenged by theatrical anarchy, the audience regroup, pass verdict and attack. The fusilade of assonance, alliteration and rhyme, the aggressive exclamations and interrogatives, communicate the primitive self-preservation of the tribe more than any exchange of ideas. At the same time, there is something admirable in the versatility of the language, something appealing about the resilience and affected philistinism of community and nation. Woolf's mockery is affectionate, the parody loving, exhibiting a curious linguistic patriotism.

The audience are not immune to the unifying power of the pageant's music, however, its capacity to challenge compacency, to prompt questions about modernity and how lives are spent:

Feet crunched the gravel. Voices chattered. The inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony? 'When we wake' (some were thinking) 'the day breaks us with its hard mallet blows.' 'The office' (some were thinking) 'compels disparity. Scattered, shattered, hither thither summoned by the bell. "Ping-ping-ping" - that's the phone. "Forward!" "Serving!" - that's the shop.' So we answer to the infernal, agelong and eternal order issued from on high. And obey. 'Working, serving, pushing, striving, earning wages - to be spent - here? Oh dear no. Now? No, by and by. When ears are deaf and the heart is dry.' (73)

This assembly of disembodied inner voices are led collectively to reflect on the banal, de-humanizing grind of work and daily life, which is represented by shrill and brutal noise and urgent imperatives. Communal disenchantment at the speed, monotony and stress of modern life, encapsulated by the insistence and intrusiveness of the telephone, modulates into sarcasm and bitterness at the tyranny of time and lives wasted, culminating in the satirical neatness of rhyme. The unarguable symmetry of sound rehearses the inescapable logic of human experience.

4.2 The registration of sound

Between the Acts is Woolf's 'noisiest' novel, not only in its attention to the auditory impact and sonic interconnectedness of words, but in its meticulous registration of sound. The soundscapes of the novel are made up of natural or organic sounds, the nuances and timbres of the human voice, mechanical noise, music, and intermittent moments of silence. Diurnal, sequential time is registered in the ticking of clocks, the ticking of the gramophone, and the chiming of the church bell, which itself is compared to the tumbling succession of words in an utterance:

The words were like the first peal of a chime of bells. As the first peals, you hear the second; as the second peals, you hear the third. (16)

The ear detects simultaneity as well as procession in sounds and words, constructing a signifying whole out of imminent future and immediate past, making meaning out of anticipated, resonating and overlapping sounds. History, a succession of present moments, is heard in the moment of the present.

Prehistory also permeates the present, registered in the primeval and elemental noises of nature. The silence of rooms and the countryside amplifies the sounds of insects, birds, animals, the humming fecundity of the vegetable world. Flies buzz,

cows cough and bellow, birds sing, owls hoot, insects or ivy tap against window panes, trees swish, the garden drones, the wind blows voices and noises away. Isa, catching sight of her children and their nurses from her bedroom, taps on the window with her hairbrush:

They were too far off to hear. The drone of the trees was in their ears; the chirp of birds; other incidents of garden life, inaudible, invisible to her in the bedroom, absorbed them. Isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk, the innocent island floated under her window. (11)

The sounds of a benign, domesticated nature, strangely remote from the sound-proofed room, contribute to this opulent idealization of the island nation, 'innocent' and oblivious to danger. In contrast, after the pageant Miss La Trobe experiences natural sound as much more dynamic and vibrant, when a flock of starlings attack the tree behind which she is hiding:

In one flock they pelted it like so many winged stones. The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire. A whizz, a buzz rose from the bird-buzzing, bird-vibrant, bird-blackened tree. The tree became a rhapsody, a quivering cacophany, a whizz and vibrant rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabling discordantly life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree. Then up! Then off! (124)

The combination of violence and sensuality, cacophany and rhapsody, suggest both eroticism and conflict. The suddenness of the assault, the consonantal dissonance and the discordant whizz and buzz, recall the trench sounds of the First World War, but the overall effect affirms the unharmonious heterogeneity of life and the raw vitality of animal appetite.

The silence of empty rooms and the minute, muffled, or echoing noises within houses figure largely in the novel's acoustic repertoire. The absence of the human subject in human spaces is a familiar motif in Woolf's work. In *The Lady in the*

Looking-Glass: A Reflection, the eponymous lady's empty room is full of 'shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling - things that never happen, so it seems, if someone is looking'.¹¹ The air in Jacob's empty room is 'listless', 'just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the whicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there' (JR 155). One of Woolf's own earliest and most 'important' memories is of the sounds and colours of her nursery at St. Ives, the 'waves breaking' outside, the blind drawing 'its little acorn across the floor'.¹² In *Between the Acts* there are several such moments. In the Olivers' empty library, for instance, the breeze flaps a 'yellow curtain', while a 'tortoiseshell butterfly' beats on the 'lower pane of the window; beat, beat, beat; repeating that if no human being ever came, never, never, never, the books would be mouldy, the fire out and the tortoiseshell butterfly dead on the pane' (13). All of these tropes speak of loss, inscribed in the ephemerality of sound reverberating in deserted human spaces, somehow doubly resonant because unheard.

Later, in the dining-room, after the butler Candish has departed, two portraits continue to stare out at the empty room:

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence. (24)

The receptacles of the shell and the vase recall Woolf's metaphor for her life, the bowl that 'one fills and fills and fills' (Woolf 74-5), which in turn conjures the imaginary space of the semiotic chora, filled with the maternal voice and the body and presence of the mother. The oceanic plenitude suggested by the shell, 'singing of what was before time was', reinforces the sense of the lost object of the mother in the empty room of the house. The portraits in the dining-room become the subject of conversation later in the novel, when the picture of the Lady leads the

characters 'down green glades into the heart of silence', a description which anticipates the primal 'heart of darkness' between Giles and Isa at the end of the book.

4.3 Acoustic technology and the disembodied voice

Another kind of noise percolating through *Between the Acts* is that of machines, particularly the gramophone which accompanies and punctuates the pageant. Of all Woolf's novels, this one is the most preoccupied with the effects of new acoustic technology. The most insistent and sustained voice of the pageant, for example, is the insentient, chuffing, ticking 'machine in the bushes', impersonally marking time and insinuating itself into the collective unconscious of the audience, foregrounding ephemerality with its inhuman stamina. At the same time the gramophone invokes an indefinite present, with its uncanny capture of timbre and nuance, imprisoning the human voice in the moment of its production. Sound, music, the voice, are literally written onto the phonographic disc, to be 'read' by the remorseless needle arm. The organic and the fugitive are trapped and fixed by the inanimate; dead matter and the voices of the dead are made to speak, and the rhapsodic, epiphanic musical moment becomes perpetually available.

The first act of the pageant ends with the gramophone intoning '*Dispersed are we*' over and again, a virtual voice sending the audience streaming away from the virtual theatre. The refrain is taken up by human voices in a series of rhymes at the end of paragraphs, *we, me, tea, company, tree, nursery*, and absurd, tenuous, internal rhymes, 'mind, eh?', 'behind, eh?', 'glamour' and 'sham lure' (59-60), suggesting the continuing, if relaxed, communality of the audience members, as well as the circulation and closed circularity of their ideas. The mechanical, disembodied voice demonstrates a peculiar authority in these rhymes, implanting

itself, so to speak, in the minds of the dispersing audience, hinting at the techniques of propaganda and fascism. The radio was becoming a crucial propaganda tool for Allied and Axis countries alike, transmitting the uncanny authority of the sourceless voice. This authority resides partly in the voice's anonymity, but also in its finality, its incapacity to hear and be held to account by its addressees. A similar process is at work with the microphone and the megaphone, where amplification and sheer volume are the unarguable factors. The megaphone features in *Between the Acts* at the end of Miss La Trobe's play. The half-conscious, collective response of the audience to the 'megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking affirmation' is to think 'Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that?' (111-112). The effect, evidently then, is one of communality and belonging, a transfiguration from helpless monads into a powerful, cohesive mass, with each individual subject a conduit for the collective or national will. This, then, is another way in which the pageant engages with contemporary history.

The telephone too features in the novel, though not as dramatically or pervasively as the gramophone. As well as projecting the voices of remote others into private spaces, the telephone offers a 'quasi-controlled collapse of boundaries', with the listening self 'pervaded by the vocal body of another' (Connor 206),¹³ offering the threat of the 'vocalic uncanny', or 'the sourceless voice which is in excess of the locating eye' (Connor 216). At the same time as intruding into privacy, though, the telephone can also extend it, relieving speaker and listener of the need to sustain paralinguistic features of communication, like facial expression and body language. It allows the subject to occupy a double space, the cyberspace of the switchboard and the body's private space, combining intimacy and anonymity. This duality of the telephone is well demonstrated when Mrs Oliver calls the fish-shop in Pyecombe, and is able to murmur her secret thoughts to herself while

simultaneously ordering filleted sole for lunch, thereby conducting two conversations at the same time:

'Mrs. Oliver speaking ... What fish have you this morning? Cod? Halibut? Sole? Plaice?'

'There to lose what binds us here,' she murmured. 'Soles. Filleted. In time for lunch please,' she said aloud. 'With a feather, a blue feather ... flying mounting through the air ... there to lose what binds us here ...' (12).

The semantic play on the word 'sole' sees it shift from fish, to shoes, to spirit, while the two conversations are linked together through the reformulation of sole into 'lose' (see Beer, BA xviii). This splitting of the voice suggests the schizophrenia of the postmodern subject, but also hints at other theoretical dualities. The manner of association, Isabella's lateral thinking, and the clustering of words on the basis of repeated sounds, can be explained in terms of the presence of the semiotic within the symbolic code. At the same time, a double temporality is operating; the ordering of the fish takes place within a chronological, sequential time scheme, while Isa's thoughts conform to an 'other' time of the imagination. History is happening under the auspices of the linear, the logical, the pedagogic, and the instantaneous, the intuitive, and the performative, at one and the same time.

Of these exosomatic acoustic technologies, the radio, the microphone and the megaphone empower the speaker, simultaneously curtailing distance and extending the range of the voice. The speaker is released from bodily limitations and the burden of listening, insulated from discursive interaction. Conversely, the listener is disempowered, unable to interrupt, contradict or qualify the utterances of the disembodied speaker. That the listener is also only one of a multitude further diminishes the capacity and inclination to resist the unitary authority of the amplified speaker. Amplification and broadcast grant a potent omnipresence to the sourceless, bodiless voice, making it the ideal instrument for the transmission of

information, disinformation, propaganda or edict.

The remote intimacy of the telephone is a more complex case. Making a telephone call is active and self-augmentative, admitting the speaker into the private spaces of others, and compelling them to listen and respond. The communicative process itself, though, is reciprocal, with voices meeting in a neutral, virtual space, as well as penetrating the ear and body of the other in a peculiarly direct way. Space both collapses and expands, simultaneously shrunk into the miniature labyrinth of the ear, and augmented into the void between the voices, thereby pluralizing the self. The gramophone, on the other hand, captures and fixes music or the voice; it is a technology 'governed by the figure of inscription rather than transmission' (Connor 216), related to the material permanence of the written word, as much as the ephemerality of sound. In the same way that the telephone pluralizes space and splits the subject, the gramophone pluralizes time, multiplying the singular moment and splitting voice and body altogether. The phonographic voice 'is the self split off into simulacrum, set apart from itself' (Connor 216-7).

In a number of ways, then, these acoustic technologies are not only characteristic of modernity, but also precursors of the postmodern, dividing the subject, relativizing time and distance, and pluralizing space. It is fitting, therefore, that they should feature so prominently in Woolf's last novel, which teeters on the brink of the modern apocalypse, and shadows the disintegration of modernism itself. *Between the Acts* is not only a valediction to the experiments of high modernism, however, but to the totality of the nation state, to the coherence of the subject, and to History itself. It is both violent and elegaic, a strangely self-mutilating comedy of historical and philosophical fragments, as well as a defiantly playful commemoration of a fragmenting culture; a comedy about language and literature played out against the glow of burning books.

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